The BOY SCOUTS UNDER FIRE IN MEXICO

LIEUT. HOWARD PAYSON

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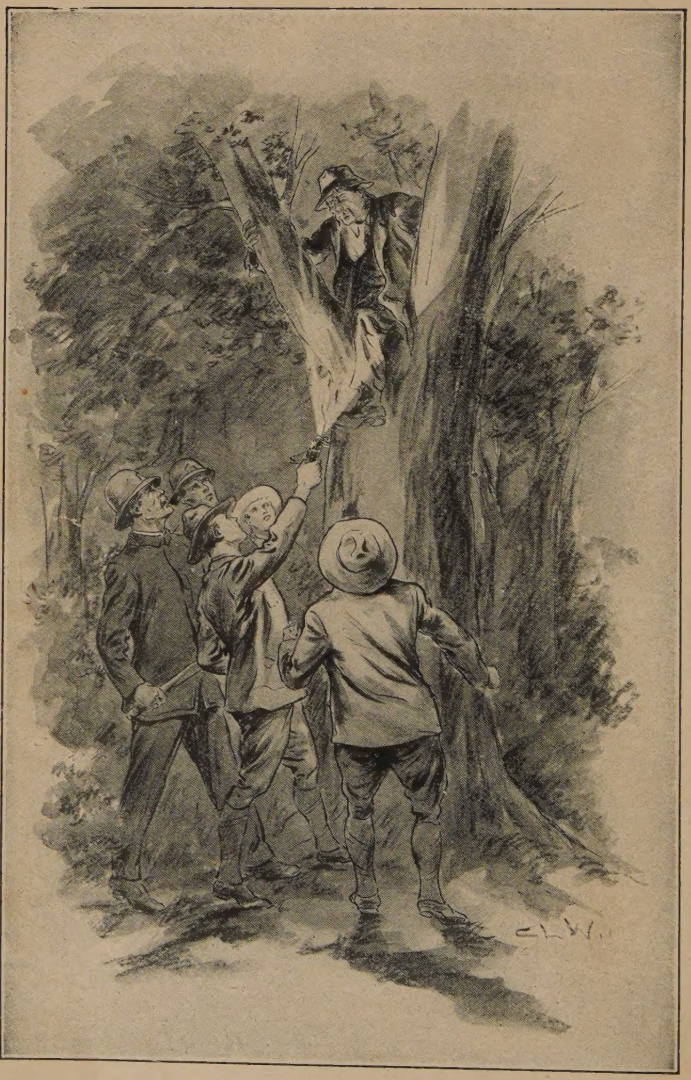

"Don't shoot gents!" called out the man who was in the crotch of an oak tree.—*Page* 59.

THE BOY SCOUTS UNDER FIRE IN MEXICO

BY

LIEUTENANT HOWARD PAYSON

AUTHOR OF "THE MOTOR CYCLE SERIES," "THE BOY SCOUTS OF THE EAGLE PATROL," "THE BOY SCOUTS ON THE RANGE," "THE BOY SCOUTS AND THE ARMY AIRSHIP," "THE BOY SCOUTS' MOUNTAIN CAMP," "THE BOY SCOUTS FOR UNCLE SAM," "THE BOY SCOUTS AT THE PANAMA CANAL," ETC.

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The Boy Scouts Under Fire in Mexico.

CHAPTER I.

FOUR SCOUTS AFLOAT.

"Luff a little, Merritt!"

"Luff it is, Rob. And let me tell you right now that if this head wind keeps on growing stronger, we're going to have it nip and tuck to get home before dark sets in. These November days have a quick end, you know. Steady now, everybody; we'll have to come about."

"On the next leg, Merritt, run in as close to the shore as you can," continued the boy who was handling the sheet of the sailboat, and who seemed to be in command, though he had given up his place at the helm to a comrade.

"Just what I'll do, Skipper Rob. Here, Andy, and you, Tubby, swing over to the la'board in a hurry, now, and help hold her down. You're the best ballast we've got aboard, Tubby."

The stout boy who seemed so well named, for he was built on the order of a tub of butter, hastened to change his position as the boom of the sailboat swung over, and the little craft with a jump started on a new tack, this time heading for the mainland.

"Say, you want to make sure and clear that point over there!" he sang out as he sprawled along the upper port side of the craft like a great crab, owing to a sudden lurch of the boat.

"Going to do it as easy as to turn your hand over," replied the boy at the rudder; "but what makes you say that, Tubby?"

"Oh! I reckon now there might be some fellers got a duck blind on that point, which is said to be the best along the bay," replied the other. "Leastways I noticed a whole raft of stools dancing up and down on the waves the last time we ran in close to the shore."

"Good for you, Tubby," remarked the boy called Rob, who was clinging steadily to the sheet, with the strain mostly relieved by the fact that it passed through a hole in the stout cleat; "it's plain that you've got your eyes with you this trip, and don't mean to be caught napping. There are two fellows in a blind over on the

point; I saw them watching us the last time we ran in; and they acted as though they were afraid we'd anchor and spoil all their evening shoot when the ducks are moving again. But never fear, we're going to clear the point by a wide margin this time."

"It was a good thing school let out so early to-day, boys," remarked the lad who up to now had not spoken, and who seemed to answer to the name of Andy; "and that Rob invited the rest of us to go with him after that half bushel of big oysters his folks want for dinner to-morrow."

"What makes you talk that way, Andy?" asked Rob, wondering if the other had also been keeping his eyes about him and noticing things. "This is Friday afternoon, and if we hadn't gone to-day what do you think would hinder our taking a little spin up the bay in the morning?"

"Oh! you never can count on the wind around Hampton," replied the other; "chances are, when you want it most of all, it gives you the go-by. And besides, Rob, I've been watching that sky up there. Look how it's mottled, will you? I've always heard that that sort of clouds meant a storm."

Rob laughed as though rather pleased.

"Well, that's just one good reason why I hurried off this afternoon instead of waiting for morning," he observed; "but then, I had a better warning than the looks of the sky to give me notice. You see, I chanced to drop around by the post office on the way to school after lunch, and stepped in to read what the weather report man in Washington had sent along. There's a whopper of a storm coming up the coast from the West Indies, and headed right this way; a sort of left-over hurricane, it says; and storm warnings are ordered up from Jacksonville to Nantucket!"

"Whee!" exclaimed Tubby, "that means winter will like as not set in right after that storm passes along, and we'll get no more sails on the bay. I hate winter for all the fun with skates and bobsleds. Don't I wish now my Uncle Mark would make up his mind to send me down there to a warm country like Mexico to look after his tangled business affairs? Honest Injun, fellers, he did say he might think of something like that if he didn't get some better soon. He's terribly bothered for fear he's going to lose all his cattle and everything, with those rebels and regulars cavorting all over that section. Hello! that

was a gun spoke then; and there goes another! Yes, and he got one duck, anyhow, because I saw it drop like a stone. And we're already past the point, boys!"

While the little sailboat is beating up against a head wind and sea, bent on making Hampton, several miles away along the Long Island shore of the bay, it might be a good time for us to renew acquaintance with the four lads on board, and glance back over their past career.

All of them were dressed in the well known khaki suits that, the world over, have become a recognized sign manual of Boy Scouts. These lads belonged to Hampton Troop, and were instrumental in starting the organization in the shore town. For some time it had consisted of but a single patrol, the Eagles; but as success followed their efforts, and more boys became enthused and enlisted, other patrols known as the Owl, the Black Fox, and the Badger were formed; so that at the time we meet Rob and his chums in the sailboat there was a very strong troop in Hampton, with even a rival organization under way.

Rob Blake was the leader of the Eagle Patrol, and Merritt Crawford held the post of sec-

ond in command, or corporal; while Andy Bowles filled the position of bugler. Tubby as yet had not aspired to fill anything, unless it was his stomach; and his chums were forever joking him with regard to his fondness for eating.

In the first volume of this series, "The Boy Scouts of the Eagle Patrol," the reader was made acquainted with Rob and his friends, and followed their exciting fortunes after they had formed the patrol. Rob was the son of the president of the local bank, while Merritt's father had been known as the finest blacksmith and wheelwright in that section of Long Island; Andy's folks ran the big livery stable; and Tubby's only parent, his mother, was said to be fairly well off in property and stocks.

A happy chance allowed some of the scouts to visit the far Southwest, and in the second story many of the strange adventures that befell them there were narrated. Though "The Boy Scouts on the Range" teems with thrilling happenings, those who read it from cover to cover will admit that the Eagles bore themselves manfully under all conditions, and always acted according to scout law.

Later on some of the boys became interested in

the subject of aviation; and about this time chance allowed them to be of considerable assistance to certain parties in the employ of the Government, who were conducting experiments not far from their home town; all of which was told in the pages of "The Boy Scouts and the Army Airship."

A fourth volume was given up to what occurred while the Eagles were encamped in the wilderness; where circumstances arose that called for all their knowledge of woodcraft and scout lore; but those who have read "The Boy Scouts' Mountain Camp" will surely unite in saying that Rob and his chums met the situation as became true scouts, and came out of the affair with great credit.

In the succeeding story, "The Boy Scouts for Uncle Sam," the boys found themselves involved in a succession of thrilling events. An opportunity arose whereby their services were in demand in order to save the design of a wonderful submarine craft, intended for the use of the United States Government, from being stolen by the clever agents of a foreign power. It was largely through the efforts of the scout patrol that this treacherous design was finally foiled.

A sixth volume, just preceding the present story, "The Boy Scouts at the Panama Canal," contained the history of events that befell Rob and his particular chums at a time when they were given a splendid chance to visit the great ditch which Uncle Sam was then digging down on the Isthmus. Once again they managed to bring into play the resourcefulness which, as members of the Eagle Patrol, had been developed in them; and it was principally through the agency of scoutcraft that the evil designs which certain envious nations had upon the locks of the canal were blocked.

Which short but necessary explanation once more brings us to the four chums as they tacked back and forth while trying to make the home port before dusk set in. Now that they were headed toward the mainland they made rapid progress, for the wind was certainly increasing in force right along. It came from a point that enabled them to make this the long leg, gaining quite a considerable distance. Once again they tacked, and the best they could expect to do was to hold their own in a beat toward the sandy outer shore of the bay, which helped to make the inlet all but landlocked.

"This is sure going some!" Tubby called out, as he began to get himself into readiness for another quick slide across when they should come about again; the spray was flying in their faces, more or less, and the waves that raced past seemed tipped with white.

"Look out for your heads when we swing around!" called Merritt. "That boom is heavy enough to sweep you overboard, I guess!"

"Excuse me from taking a bath right here and now!" exclaimed Tubby, who was not much of a swimmer at the best. "But see here, what does all this mean, fellers? Why, look at the water in the bottom of the boat, will you? Tell you what, she's gone and sprung a leak as sure as anything! Rob, you won't head out in the bay again, will you, with all this chance of our foundering? Gingersnaps! it keeps on getting worse and worse, I tell you! We'll sink inside of ten minutes!"

Rob, who owned the sailboat, took one look at the water that was already washing about in the bottom of the uptilted craft. He must have realized that something strange had happened to cause so staunch a boat to spring a leak, and also that the situation was serious; for no sooner

had he taken in the suspicious way in which the water was rising in the cockpit, than he shouted:

"Keep her headed straight for the shore, Merritt! We've got to beach her one way or another. Tubby, help me with the halliards so we can drop the sail. You pull up the centerboard, Andy! Hurry now, everybody!"

There was a scene of activity on board the little pleasure craft just then, with three of those lively scouts springing about their duty. And as the sail came rattling down on top of the cabin, with Tubby sprawled under its folds, and as Andy fastened the heavy centerboard which he had drawn full height in the well, the boat ran up on the sandy beach of a little cove that had chanced to lie directly ahead at the time the skipper gave his hurried orders!

CHAPTER II.

THE STRANGE LEAK.

"Gee whiz! but this is a bad job!" Merritt remarked, after the four of them had clambered over the bow of the stranded sailboat. "Here we are as much as three miles away from home, with night coming on and not much chance of getting the boat fixed so we can go on again in her."

"She never played you such a mean trick before, did she, Rob?" asked Andy, who had managed to get his feet wet in making a jump for the sandy beach, but, boylike, seemed to care very little about such a small thing.

"No, and I'm wondering right now what could have happened to make her spring a big leak like that all of a sudden," replied the other.

As though impelled by curiosity, Rob once more climbed aboard the boat and started to look around. One of the first things he did was to fling ashore a sack that seemed to be pretty heavy,—as might be expected, since it contained the half bushel of extra large oysters for which

he had been sent to the beds near the ocean side of the bay, a long way from Hampton town.

"I'm bound to get that sack home with me if I have to carry it on my back," he called out; at which the other boys, of course, declared that they would willingly "spell" him, though the prospect could not have seemed very inviting.

"But see here, will it be safe to leave the boat in this little cove all night with a big storm heading along up the coast?" Merritt asked next.

"Safe or not," came from the one aboard the stranded boat, "there's nothing else we can do, is there? Besides, if that storm holds off till noon, I'll be up here on my wheel the first thing tomorrow, bale her out, fix the leak, and work her back home by hook or crook. Hello! what in the wide world does this mean, now?"

"Found the place where the water came in, have you, Rob?" called Tubby, who was hefting the sack of bivalves, and perhaps secretly wondering whether it might not make their labor of transporting the same to the Blake house easier if they proceeded to discard a few of the shells and partake of the juicy contents.

"Why, it's a *round* hole, I tell you!" shouted Rob.

"What's that you're giving us?" demanded Andy. "I've seen some queer things happen to boats, but that's the first time I ever knew one to spring a leak with a round hole. Are you joshing us, Rob?"

"I tell you it's as round as a quarter, and about as big into the bargain!" continued the other vigorously. "And what's more, this boat never sprung a leak!"

"Oh! say, p'raps now a sword fish rammed his beak through her planks!" ejaculated Tubby, who could always be depended on to think up the most extraordinary explanation possible when anything out of the ordinary happened.

All of the other scouts had now crawled back on the boat, their curiosity having been fully aroused by the strange announcement made by Rob. Merritt even insisted on feeling down in the water, and thrusting his forefinger through the said hole.

"Jiggered if what Rob says isn't so, boys," he called out; "because I've got my finger all the way through the hole right now! Why, it's as smooth as if it had been made with an inch bit. Take my word for it, that's the truth!"

"And I've got a good notion that was what

did make it!" Rob observed solemnly; at which Tubby gasped, opening his mouth in the queer way he had of doing when greatly astonished.

"You mean somebody went and bored a hole right through the planks of your boat, do you, Rob?" he asked excitedly. "But why didn't the water rush in before, when we've been more than a whole hour sailing?"

"Why, you silly," cried Andy, "of course it must have had a plug in the hole! It was probably fixed so that sooner or later it just had to be jarred loose, and the pressure of the water outside would push the same in. That was what happened when we made our last turn. And this same old plug must have been hidden under the false bottom, which none of us thought to pull up till she floated loose!"

"Here's the proof of it, fellows!" said Rob just then; and he held up something he had discovered floating on the surface of the water, that already partly filled the cockpit toward the stern of the stranded boat.

"It is a plug, as sure as you live!" ejaculated Merritt. "Let's look at it, Rob!"

One after another they examined the round piece of wood, which had undoubtedly been

shaped just to fit the hole bored in the bottom plank.

"That was about the meanest trick I ever heard tell of!" grumbled Tubby, his round face redder than ever with indignation. "If ever I could find out who did it, I'd feel like showing him up to all Hampton, that's what. Here, what's this on the water, fellers? Looks to me like a curled chip, such as would come out when an auger or a brace and bit was used."

"Just what it is, Tubby," added Merritt; "which shows that this measly hole was bored since the last time Rob went sailing. Otherwise, he must have seen the plug when he took out the false flooring to clean the boat."

"It's a queer shaving, boys," continued Tubby, with his head bent low over the object he held in his hand. "See, here, where there's a break all the way along, and right in the middle, too! What would you make of that, Rob?"

"I might be away off in my guess," the other went on to say, after he, too, had closely examined the shaving; "but it seems to me as though that bit must have had a good-sized nick in each half of the biting edge, queer as that

would be. As it kept on turning, it left this raised ridge, you see."

"Just what I had in my mind, Rob, give you my word for it," Tubby continued excitedly. "And I'm thinking right now that this ought to be a pretty good clew to prove who made that hole in your boat. All we've got to do is to find a bit with a nick in both tongues that fits this shaving; and the thing is as plain as the nose on Andy's face, here."

"Suppose you leave me out when you're making comparisons, Tubby; but then you're only saying that because you're envious; your own nose doesn't count for much, with such fat cheeks alongside!" Andy burst out.

But Rob considered that what Tubby had said was worth noticing, for he immediately started to congratulate him,—as a patrol leader always should do when one of his comrades has given positive evidences of waking up and noticing things.

"Tubby, that's a smart dodge of yours, let me tell you," he went on to say, as he turned on the fat scout; "and if you keep that chip so it won't break, and can find a bit that fits the marks to a dot, the chances are you'll know who played

this dirty trick on me. And because you thought of it first I'm going to hand that job over to you, see? Here's the plug and the chip for you to keep. And some fine day I'll expect to have a report from you."

"Well, what's the next word, Rob?" asked Merritt, as they all made the flying leap ashore again. This time it was Tubby who made a miscalculation and landed in six inches of water. He hastily scrambled up on the beach to the accompaniment of rude laughter from Andy, who felt better now that there were a pair of them with wet feet; for misery always likes company.

"Oh! we'll make the cable fast to this stunted tree here, and leave the old boat to take her chances to-night," replied the other, as he started to carry his words into action. "Doubtless I'll find her safe in the morning, and be able to get her home if the storm holds off."

"You don't come up here without having me along, remember," warned Merritt; at which Rob stopped long enough in his labor of securing the end of the rope to the tree to give the other a nod and a smile; for they were chums in everything, and almost inseparable.

"And the rest of you just keep mum about this nasty little business, so that I c'n have the whole field to myself," Tubby warned them, as though feeling of considerable importance since the patrol leader had handed the mysterious case over into his charge. "I'm going to learn who bored that hole, or know the reason why, if I have to visit every workshop in Hampton by degrees, and find some excuse for examining every blessed bit there is. But right now I want to say I've got a hunch I c'n lay my finger on the guilty one, even if I dassent say so till I get the proof fixed on him good and hard. Then look out for explosions, that's all!"

Having fastened his boat as well as circumstances allowed, Rob picked up the sack containing the selected oysters, threw it over his shoulder, and announced himself ready for the three mile walk along the road that skirted the shore side of the bay.

The four scouts soon found themselves trudging along the highway which led from the direction of Montauk Point. It was in fair condition, as they well knew, having been over it many times on their wheels, or in vehicles of various types from a car to a hay wagon.

"If we had any sort of luck, now," remarked Merritt, after they had been walking for some little while, and he made ready to relieve Rob of his load, "we'd hear some sort of wagon coming up behind, and get a ride home."

"Don't I wish it would happen, though?" sighed Tubby, who on account of his burden of flesh always found it much harder than the other Eagles to hike over the country. He was so stubborn, however, that he would persist in anything he undertook until he fairly dropped in his tracks, rather than give up.

"Well," remarked Rob, chuckling, "some good fairy must have heard that wish, Tubby, because right now I can get the thud of horses' hoofs on the road back yonder. And there goes the crack of a whip."

"You're right, Rob," observed Andy quickly; "queer how you get on to all these little wrinkles before the rest of us. Seems like you must always 'be prepared,' like every true scout is expected to keep himself."

"Hope it's an empty wagon, and not a loaded hay rig," grunted Tubby.

"According to the way the sounds hit me," continued Rob, "it's a wagon, all right; and it

rumbles like an empty one, too. But we shall soon know, for it is overtaking us right fast now."

"Let's halt here, and line up, two on each side of the road," suggested Merritt. "The darkness has gathered so it's hard to see any distance; but there around the bend back of us comes a white horse on the trot! Rob, you hit the nail right on the head, for sure enough it's drawing an empty wagon, with two men sitting on the seat and using the whip."

"Looks like they might be in a hurry," suggested Andy. "Watch that one turning around to take another look along the road behind. Get ready to give 'em a hail, Eagles. Rob, you do the talking while the rest of us let out our Eagle cry."

Two minutes later and the vehicle had arrived almost opposite where the scouts stood half screened by the bushes. At a signal from Rob the four stepped out upon the road. Rob started to call to the men in the wagon, meaning to ask them for permission to ride, while Merritt and Tubby and Andy gave a united "K-r-e-e-e," that sounded very weird as heard under such conditions.

What followed astonished the four boys very much indeed. The men, seeing so many uniformed figures blocking the road, as it seemed, gave vent to exclamations of abject alarm. Jumping from their seat, they started to run back along the way they had just come. Then suddenly turning to one side they plunged into the brush, where their hasty progress was marked by all sorts of sounds that would indicate that they were stumbling blindly through the thick undergrowth, tumbling over logs and rocks, evidently on the verge of being panic-stricken!

CHAPTER III.

WHAT HAPPENED ON THE ROAD.

The four boys stood there on the dusty road in the twilight of that windy November day, and for a full minute seemed unable to express the sense of bewilderment that had overwhelmed them all. Alongside was the white horse attached to the empty wagon; and from the docile manner in which the animal had come to a sudden halt and stood there, he was not at all averse to having a resting spell after having been whipped so steadily that he was in a sweat.

"Well, I'll be jiggered, if that don't beat the Dutch!" Merritt burst out, he being apparently the first to recover his breath.

"Why, they're gone!" ejaculated Tubby. "And say, they went and left their rig with us, don't you see? Well, I must say they are awfully polite. This is more'n we ever expected, isn't it, fellers?"

Rob was laughing, as though secretly amused at the hasty flight of the two men who had been in the wagon.

"Chances are, now, they took us for hoboes meaning to hold 'em up; and that's why they jumped for it!" Andy suggested.

"Well," remarked Rob, "I couldn't say that I'd blame them for thinking anything after hearing all that racket you three scouts made giving the Eagle cry. Most people would jump at the conclusion that a lot of lunatics had broken loose from that asylum down at Amityville. You should have let me say my little say without that heathen noise. It's all very well for a scout in the bush to let another know what patrol he belongs to when he sees another approaching; but ordinary people hardly understand what that racket means."

"But, Rob, do you believe they took us for desperate yeggmen wanting to hold 'em up on the road here, and rob 'em?" asked Andy.

"No, I don't," replied the patrol leader readily. "In the first place, even if it is getting dusk right now, it's still light enough for anybody with eyes to see that we don't happen to be a ragged lot like tramps are pretty much all of the time."

"Then why should they skoot like that, I want to know?" Tubby inquired.

"Like as not they saw our scout uniforms," suggested Merritt at a hazard.

"That's just what they did," Rob hastened to add with emphasis; "and from the shock the sight of the same gave the parties, I'm thinking they must have guessed we were soldiers who meant to arrest a couple of men driving a white nag!"

"Oh! I wonder now if that would explain the queer stunt?" Tubby ventured to say.

"Sounds pretty good to me, Rob," was what the corporal of the troop remarked as he stood there and stared at the spot where the pair of alarmed men had left the road and plunged into the thicket. "And maybe some of the rest of you noticed as I did that the taller one of the pair limped, as though he might have a bad leg or a sprained ankle."

"Yes, I noticed that, Merritt, and was waiting to see if any of the rest of you had used your eyes to advantage," Rob told him.

"I did, cross my heart if I didn't!" reported Tubby.

"And I would have seen the same only the rest of you happened to be in my way," the fourth scout struck in, not wanting to have it appear

that he was the only fellow to be so dazed by what had happened that he had failed in his duty as a scout to observe every little detail.

"And I want all of you to take notice," continued the patrol leader, "that just where they left the road and disappeared from our sight, there happens to be growing a white birch tree that hangs out at an angle of twenty-five degrees. Birches are not so plentiful around here but what we could easily find that same one again in case we wanted to try and follow up the tracks of the men."

"To give 'em back their rig, you mean, Rob?" hinted Tubby.

"Either that or for some other reason," replied the other shortly.

"Well, I don't hear any scrambling now," remarked Andy. "Probably they are so far away the sounds don't carry."

"But how about that ride to town?" demanded Tubby anxiously. "Do we get cheated out of that just because a pair of sillies chose to get cold feet at sight of scout uniforms, and skedaddled like a dog with a tin can tied to his tail?"

"Yes, how about it, Rob?" continued Merritt. "Do we leave this horse and wagon on

the road here, doing no good at all, while we trudge along over two miles of ground, carrying this heavy sack of shellfish? If you asked me now, I would say let's borrow the outfit, and give thanks!"

"Ditto here!" exclaimed Tubby eagerly.

"Count me in," said Andy, "and that makes it three affirmatives; how do you vote, Rob? Say 'yes,' and make it unanimous, won't you?"

The patrol leader laughed again at the appeal, and glanced around at the faces of his three chums.

"Well, it would be like looking a gift horse in the mouth to let this fine chance slip past us," he went on to say, much to the delight of his companions; for Tubby immediately threw up his campaign hat to signify his joy, while the others nodded their heads and looked pleased.

"Good for you, Rob," Merritt said, as he proceeded without more ado to pick up the sack of oysters, and, stepping over to the tail end of the wagon, toss them aboard. "So far as I can see, I don't believe we'll have any trouble about taking the rig, even if the men turn out to be honest, which I'm right sure they won't. We can say they abandoned it on the road, and we

thought we ought to fetch it into town to turn it over to the police; which we mean to do, remember, fellows."

"Sure, we'll only be doing the right thing to deliver the outfit to the Chief," Tubby went on record as saying. "My Uncle Mark was telling me about something that happened to him as near like this as two peas; and it turned out that the men in the rig were a pair of desperate bank burglars, making off with the stuff they'd hooked from a town not far away. That was how he got his first thousand dollars, he says, that started him along the road to success, years and years ago. And Merritt, did you take a good look to see if there is any mysterious little package in that same wagon? Wouldn't it be a queer thing now if history took to repeating itself, and this time Uncle Mark's nephew was one of the bunch that recovered the stolen plunder? Anything doing, Merritt?"

"Well, you'll have to make up your mind to being disappointed this time, Tubby," observed the corporal. "This wagon hasn't a thing in it except a handful of hay, and I've pulled that around to make sure it didn't hide anything. But we didn't calculate to discover any jewelry or

bank funds; the best we asked for was a chance to ride to Hampton; and we've got it. Pile in, fellows. This horse has come some way, and has been made to travel right lively, too. Why, he's reeking with sweat! Somebody must have been in a hurry!"

They lost no time in clambering into the wagon. Tubby, being the slowest to get up, found the seat fully occupied.

"Where do I come in?" he asked rather plaintively, after the fashion of the unfortunate one who was usually being left out.

"Plenty of room back there in the wagon, Tubby!" chuckled Rob.

"Use the sack of oysters for a seat if you want to!" added Andy.

"Can't you move over and make room for one more?" pleaded the fat scout.

"We might if it was for a Living Skeleton, but not for the Fat Boy of the Side Show," was Merritt's reply. And so Tubby was compelled to climb into the body of the wagon, and sit down as best he could on the hard bed.

"Please don't make the nag gallop, boys," he asked as a particular favor; "because if you do he'll swing the wagon around every-which-way,

and there's no telling what would happen to me. I guess I've got feelings, if I do happen to measure a little more around the waist than anybody else present."

"A little!" jeered Andy. "You must mean as much as the whole three of us put together, don't you, Tubby?"

"Forget it," mumbled the other; for already the vehicle had begun to move. As Merritt whipped the tired horse, it gave a jump forward that caused Tubby to roll over on his back the first thing, and then clutch wildly at the sides of the wagon, as though in mortal terror lest he be tossed out and left there on the road to walk home.

"This is something like a treat, after tramping along for a whole mile, and with that heavy sack into the bargain," Rob declared, as they began to make fair progress in the direction of the home town.

"Talk to me about your good luck," ventured Andy, who sat on the other end of the seat from the driver, "it seems to me the Eagles are always having things happen to them that never would come to other fellows."

"But not all of the same are favors by a long

sight, Andy," Merritt reminded him. "Don't forget how we had that boat spring a leak; and if the accident had occurred when we were out in the middle of the bay, chances are we'd have had to swim for the shore. The good luck came in its happening near land."

"Well, that's what I mean, of course," persisted the other. "If we do have to run up against a snag, why something always turns up to help us out. Look back at lots of things that have come our way, and you'll say I'm right. And you three fellows especially have had luck chase after you more than a few times."

"I guess that is about right," sang out Tubby from the rear; showing that although he might be having the time of his life holding on to the sides of the wagon as it clattered along the road, all the same he kept his ears wide open.

"Well," remarked Rob, with a laugh, "any lot of scouts who can have a rig like this handed to them without the asking, when they have several miles over a dusty road to tramp, ought not to complain. We're on what they call 'Easy Street' right now. And who knows but there may be a few dollars' reward offered for the recovery of

a stolen outfit? It wouldn't surprise me very much; because the way those men scuttled at sight of our suits makes me believe they couldn't have been strictly honest. No decent party need fear the khaki uniform, whether of a soldier or a Boy Scout!"

"Look! what was it that flashed ahead there in the bushes?" suddenly exclaimed Andy. Half unconsciously, Merritt at the same time started to pull at the reins, so that the horse no longer galloped headlong as before, much to the relief of poor knocked-about Tubby.

The boy in the back of the wagon was just about to try and scramble to his knees in order to look beyond his mates on the seat, when, without the slightest warning, a very gruff voice full of authority called out:

"Pull in there and throw up your hands, every one of you, d'ye hear? You're all under arrest!"

Moving figures sprang out upon the white road, and the horse, finding his forward progress blocked, gladly came to a full stop. The occupants of the wagon sat there, hardly knowing what to make of this new happening.

One man caught the horse close to the bits,

and two others hastened to advance to the wagon, as if to make sure that none of those who occupied the vehicle made a flying leap from the back and took to their heels.

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN SCOUTCRAFT WAS IN DEMAND.

"Looks like the rig, all right, Chief!" one of the men called out.

The tall man he addressed did not reply; for, truth to tell, at that particular minute he was staring very hard at the three scouts who sat there on the seat of the wagon. There was not a great deal of light, but evidently he had made a discovery that astounded him.

"Why, they're a lot of boys, after all!" exclaimed the man who had advanced to the other side of the wagon, holding something up that glittered like a revolver.

"Yes, and wearing scouts' uniforms at that!" added the tall man whom one of the others had called "Chief." As he pushed still closer to the wagon he went on to say, "I think I ought to know this lad here. Is it you, Rob Blake?"

"Just who it is, Chief," replied the other soberly; "and you can hardly blame us for having our breath taken away on being held up so sud-

denly at the point of the pistol and told that we were under arrest!"

"But the white horse deceived us, Rob," hastily answered the other, who was really the new head of the Hampton police force, a man who had made it his business to get acquainted with every boy in town, believing that he could nip lots of impending trouble in the bud by letting boys know that he was interested in all they did, and ready to prove himself their best friend. "You see, we've been 'phoned that a couple of desperate men who escaped from the jail over at Riverhead had stolen a wagon and a white horse and were heading this way. So we came out to lay for the rascals. Sorry to have bothered you, boys."

"Well, this may prove to be the very horse and wagon they told you about, Chief," Rob went on to say; while the other two officers now crowded up close to catch all that passed.

"Just what it might!" added Andy, wishing to let everybody know that he was in the affair, if he didn't happen to be holding either the lines or the whip.

"Please tell us, won't you, Chief, whether one of the men that broke jail limped like he had a

bad leg or a sprained ankle?" Tubby broke out, before Rob could get in another word.

"What's that you're telling me, my lad?" exclaimed the officer eagerly. "Now, I didn't think it worth while to mention the fact to you, but the truth is the taller man of the two did have a bad fall when he broke out, and he must have injured himself in some way. Do you mean that you've set eyes on that precious pair of rogues?"

"It was this way," Rob started to say, meaning to make his explanations as brief as possible. "We had been up the bay to get half a bushel of select oysters from old Cap. Jenkins over at his beds; and on the way home we had the misfortune to spring a leak, so that we had to beach the sailboat and start along the road, as night was coming on, and we wanted to get back in time for supper."

"That's right, supper was the main thing we had in mind, Chief, believe me," Tubby volunteered just then; after which he again relapsed into silence, and allowed Rob to finish his story.

"Of course we wanted to get a ride if we could, Chief, because the sack was heavy," the patrol leader went on to say, "and, well, boys always like to ride better than they do to walk.

Pretty soon we heard a horse and wagon coming after us, and one of the two men aboard was whipping the poor beast dreadfully. Well, we lined up, and as soon as they came along all of us stepped out to ask if we could have a lift as far as Hampton; when, would you believe me, the men jumped out of the wagon as if they'd seen a ghost, and went back along the road as fast as they could tear, soon breaking into the scrub, and disappearing."

"Leaving you the rig; is that it, Rob?" asked the officer, laughing as he spoke.

"Just what they did, sir," continued the patrol leader; "and you may be sure we couldn't even get our breath together to call out and thank them before they'd vanished. Well, we got to talking it over, and made up our minds the men must have stolen the rig, and were badly frightened by the sight of our scout uniforms, thinking we might be soldiers meaning to arrest them. And after we had waited a little while, thinking they might come back, why, we just made up our minds there wasn't any use looking a gift horse in the mouth; but that we'd take the rig to town so as to turn it over to you at Police Headquarters. And here it is at your service, Chief."

"But I hope you'll let us ride to town in it?" Tubby struck in.

"Well, you've all done me a great favor, boys," the tall official went on to say; "and if so be you feel that you must get along home, why, take the rig and leave it in front of my office. But if you could put us in the way of nabbing that pair of escaped rogues, you'd be doing a great thing. They're a bad crowd, and the longer they stay loose, the worse it is going to be for the community."

"We can help you some there, Chief!" Rob hastened to declare.

"I should say we could!" added Andy with emphasis.

"We happen to know just where they left the road and plunged into the brush; and perhaps we might even be of some assistance to you in following their trail, Chief; because, you understand, scouts are supposed to know more or less about such things. Woodcraft comes under the head of a scout's education. What d'ye say, fellows; shall we turn around right now and take these officers to the place where the leaning white birch hangs over the road?"

Every voice came in a decided affirmative.

Even Tubby, who had been amusing himself while holding on to the sides of the wagon by figuring out just how long he must wait until he could hope to find himself seated at the supper table, heroically pushed aside all such temptations, and proved that he could rise to an occasion like a true scout.

"Then that's settled," said Rob, proud of his mates of the Eagle Patrol; "and if you will wait till we turn the horse around, Chief, you can have my seat here."

Merritt quickly backed the wagon into the side of the road, and faced the animal in the direction from which he had just come.

Meanwhile Rob and Andy had crawled over the rear of the seat and joined Tubby, who seemed pleased when he found that he was going to have company. The Chief and one of his men occupied the seat, along with the scout who was doing the driving; while the other officer contented himself with sitting so that his legs dangled over the tail board.

In this fashion, then, they started to retrace the ground the boys had so recently gone over. Of course the Chief had a dozen questions to

ask in connection with the actions of the two men, as to what they said and what they did.

"The only words any of us heard them say were: 'Holy smoke, looky here, Con!'" Rob told him. "But they made up for it by doing some tall sprinting, lame man or not, that would have won them a prize at an athletic meet."

"Well, right there you've settled the thing and clinched it into the bargain," the tall police officer remarked with a satisfied chuckle; "because, don't you know, one of the rascals went by the name of Con Keating. And if the taller of the pair has a broken leg, why we ought to be able to run them down, and bag him, anyway, even if the other gives us the slip. But I'm hoping he'll stick to his pal until we can come up with them."

"We ought to be nearly back to where we picked up the wagon, now, hadn't we, Rob?" asked Merritt, who was straining his eyes trying to make out a white birch tree leaning over the road on the left.

"One more bend and we'll be there," answered Rob, with such absolute confidence that every one of the other scouts knew he had been keeping tabs of the conditions, and could tell to a

fraction just when they were drawing near the point that had been marked down in their memories.

A minute later and it turned out that Rob was perfectly correct; because Merritt discovered the landmark for himself.

"There it is, Chief, just ahead of us," he remarked, "where you see that white birch bending over. We made it a point to mark the place, thinking that p'raps you or somebody else would want to know about the men who ran away."

"A clever bit of business, my lad," remarked the other admiringly. And, indeed, what he had seen of these Scouts during the few months he had been in charge of the Hampton police had caused the Chief to entertain a very high opinion of their ability, and make him a firm advocate for the cause they represented.

The horse was pulled up close to where the white slender birch could be seen through the gathering gloom.

"Wait till I strike a match, and I'll try to find a piece of lightwood to make a torch," said Rob, jumping from the wagon.

"No use bothering that way, lad," called out the Chief; "because I've got something along

with me that goes away ahead of any wood torch you ever saw."

"Then you must mean an electric hand torch," Tubby ventured to remark. "I know, because I've got one at home."

"Much good that does you," jeered Andy. "A torch, like a gun, is the kind of thing that when you do want it you want it badly."

"Well, how was I to guess all that would happen?" demanded Tubby indignantly. "Don't you think that if I had known we would get that hole in the boat, have a horse and wagon shoved on us this way, and be held up by the Chief and his men, I'd gone and made sure to fetch my little torch along? Sure I would."

"And if I'd known all that," chuckled Andy, always ready to have the last word, "d'ye know what I would have done the first thing? Why, told Rob about that old plug in the bottom of his boat, and seen to it that it was driven in so hard it never could work loose. And that would have saved us from all the rest of the business!"

"All right," rejoined Tubby, with a never-say-die accent to his voice; "all I can remark is that we would have lost a heap of entertaining experiences, that's what!"

They had all left the wagon before this, and Merritt managed to secure the horse to a tree near by; so that in case they found the animal there on their return, after striving to locate the two escaped jail birds, they might have a pleasant means of transportation to Hampton town.

When the police officer had produced his little electric hand torch, which was capable of being carried in a vest pocket and yet gave quite a fine glow when the current was switched on, he told Rob that he had better take possession of the light, as he would really be the one to need it. As for himself and his men, they meant to keep themselves in constant readiness for grappling with the two desperate rogues, should they have the good fortune to come up with them.

Nothing could have pleased Rob more than this splendid chance to show what the education of a scout along the line of woodcraft was doing for the boys of the Eagle Patrol. Here was an opportunity to make a test of their knowledge. If they proved equal to the task of finding those two men who were doing all in their power to elude recapture, it would certainly go far to witness that these scouts had not studied the art of trailing in vain.

And hence it was with considerable satisfaction, as well as a firm determination to exhaust every means he had in his power in order to come up with the fugitives, that the young leader of the Eagles accepted that handy electric torch, and immediately commenced to flash its white glow over the ground in the vicinity of the white birch.

Men and boys trailed along after Rob; Tubby, Merritt and Andy making sure to keep well in the rear, so that they might not interfere with the plans of the Chief.

CHAPTER V.

ON THE TRAIL.

In this manner they left the dusty road behind them, and entered among the bushes and growth of scrubby trees that bordered it.

The three Eagles who came just after the stalwart police officers kept in a bunch; not that any of them felt afraid in the least; but as they were unarmed, save for the various clubs they had managed to pick up on the way, they seemed to think there might be safety in numbers.

Besides, if at any time they felt in a communicative mood, it was possible to put their heads together and pass whispers along.

Rob, in the lead, was bending over and bringing that little hand torch into play in great style. Nothing could have been finer for the purpose, he quickly concluded, and made up his mind on the spot that he would own such a handy article at the very first opportunity.

The steady white glow allowed him to see the ground so plainly that he could readily distin-

guish every little mark made by the feet of the fleeing men. On the whole, Rob would have called that job something of a snap; for neither of the fugitives seemed to have once thought of such a thing as "blinding their trail"; such as clever scouts generally do when playing "fox and geese," or some game of that sort.

In fact, the taller fellow, the one who limped so badly, had actually dragged his injured leg after him; and in this way he managed to leave a broad track that Rob believed even a tenderfoot might follow with ease.

Still there were places where the ground was hard, being made for the most part of rock; and here the tracker was compelled to be more careful in order that he might not be thrown off the trail by accident and have all sorts of trouble finding it again.

"Say, keep your eye on Rob, fellers," Tubby whispered, when he was so wound up that he just could not keep quiet any longer. "Isn't he showing the Chief a few wrinkles about following a set of tracks, though?"

"Not so loud, Tubby," cautioned Merritt, who, as the second in command of the Eagle Patrol, had a certain amount of authority invested in

him that the rest of the scouts always recognized, particularly when Rob was not on duty or absent.

"But he is trailing along like a regular old fox, isn't he?" persisted Tubby, who was hard to repress when he felt the spirit move within him.

"Course he is," muttered Andy; "and this isn't the first time Rob has made grown men sit up and take notice. But there, he's hit a snarl of some kind!"

"Well, you take my word for it, Rob will unravel it in double-quick order!" the stout boy assured him.

"Silence!" hissed Merritt; and this time he apparently "squelched" Tubby, for the latter had nothing more to say just then; but as he had freed his mind, that was a matter of small consequence.

Rob was skirmishing around as though he might have lost the trail owing to the hardness of the ground. He had held up a hand in order to warn the three officers not to stumble over him, and then with his torch held low, proceeded to examine his surroundings.

They saw him rise up and flash his light to

the right, then to the left, and finally straight ahead. Apparently he was making up his mind from the conformation of things which way the two fleeing men might have chosen as they pushed forward in the semi-darkness. In other words, Rob was applying an old principle, trying to "put himself in their place" so that he could decide what their natural action under the circumstances would have been.

He seemed to settle quickly which way had looked the most promising to the anxious eyes of two sorely pressed fellows, one of whom could hardly drag himself along, for he immediately turned toward the left, and again flashed his torch on the ground.

Almost immediately afterward the three scouts in the rear caught a queer little sound, not unlike the faint squawk of an eaglet in its nest at feeding time.

"There, did you hear that, fellers?" demanded Tubby excitedly, though he did manage to keep his voice whittled down to a hoarse whisper.

"It was Rob giving us the sign of the Eagles that told he had found what he was looking for; sure it was!" observed Andy.

"That's all right, but you boys let up on your

talking. Understand?" was the warning given by the corporal.

Apparently the boy in the lead must have given the three officers some sort of signal with his disengaged hand, for as he moved off they started after him, doubtless with renewed confidence in his ability to lead them. If either of those men who accompanied the Chief on this mission had been inclined to scoff at the usefulness of the education of a Boy Scout, he must have had an object lesson then and there that he would not soon forget.

Later on every one of them candidly admitted that without the aid of Rob they would never have been able to follow the trail of the fleeing rascals for five rods, not having been taught how to read signs, as are all scouts who deserve the name.

After that Rob did not seem to run up against any more snags, for he kept moving steadily along, now turning to one side, and then to the other, just as the parties he tracked had chanced to move in order to avoid some fallen tree, a stump, or a thick clump of thorny bushes that barred their path.

It was splendid work, and the trio of boys who

kept tabs on what their patrol leader was doing, felt a genuine thrill of admiration for Rob's skill. Once again were the Eagles proving their worth in an emergency; and after this Hampton folks would have still more reason to feel proud of the patrol and the troop.

"Listen!" said Andy suddenly, "what is that I hear?"

His two companions halted for a brief period of time, because apparently they had not as yet chanced to catch the sound that disturbed Andy.

"Seems like running water to me," ventured Tubby, as if in more or less doubt.

"It is running water," affirmed Merritt quickly; "a little stream of some kind, I guess. Seems to me I remember one that trails through this patch of scrub oak timber."

"Well, we're heading straight for it," remarked Andy; "and like as not the two men wanted to get a drink right bad. They ran so hard they felt dry enough to drain a spring-hole at one turn."

"Sh! You see Rob's heading that way; let's move on!" Merritt told them.

It turned out just as they figured. The runaways had indeed gone straight for the little

streamlet that gurgled through the underbrush; and Rob showed by means of his light just where they had both knelt down alongside the creek to drink.

Just as the other three scouts came up, they heard Rob give a little exclamation that seemed to have in it something like pity.

"What have you found now, son?" asked the big Chief, understanding from the manner in which the clever scout had given this cry that he must have made a new discovery.

"I reckon that poor wretch got a worse broken leg than any one has thought up to now, Chief," Rob remarked with a long breath, as he riveted the light of his little torch upon one certain spot of ground.

"How d'ye make that out, Rob?" asked Tubby before any one else could speak; for slow in his movements though the fat youth might often seem no one was more ready to interject a word than Tubby.

"Here is where both of them knelt down so they could bend forward and drink," replied the obliging patrol leader, always ready to post his comrades on these little points that would add to their scout education.

"Yep, we can see the marks easy," Andy assured the other.

"Here is where the shorter one got down, because you can see the distance between the marks of his knees and the toes of his shoes doesn't measure nearly as much as this other does. And looking closer you'll see that the tall man wasn't able to double up his left leg as he wanted to."

"That was the one they said he had hurt," remarked the Chief, undoubtedly deeply interested in all that the boy was saying.

"Now, if you look here at the place where his left foot dug into the soil when he lay down to drink, you'll find a stain that tells a story of its own!" Rob went on to say, as he held the torch still lower, so that all could see.

"Jiminy crickets!" exclaimed Tubby, in an awed tone. "Why, it's a blood mark, fellers; sure it is!"

"Yes," added the Chief, "that's right, son. He hurt his leg worse than anybody could have known about. That Con has got plenty of nerve to keep going all this time with such a bad wound! He certainly wanted to escape a term at the pen, all right."

"I think he couldn't drag himself much

further, Chief; and we'll be apt to run across him soon, even if the other man gets away," Rob observed; and so much confidence had the big officer learned to put in what the patrol leader of the Eagles said, that he nodded his head and simply remarked:

"That's good news, Rob; let's get a move on again, and close in on our birds!"

"Are they armed, do you know, Chief?" asked Merritt; for he had been wondering what sort of reception they would receive when they finally closed in on the fugitives, who were reckoned desperate men.

"Not so far as is known," replied the other. "I was particular to ask that, for I knew I'd have to shape my plans accordingly. It seems that they raided an old scare-crow that had been left in a field, and managed to change clothes with the dummy after a fashion, for they wanted to pose as tramps, you see. But armed or not, we are ready to settle accounts with the rascals. We're close at your heels, Rob; make all the time you want."

Rob was not having any difficulty whatever in following the trail after the two fugitives had left the little streamlet. He seemed to be as

keen on the scent as a rabbit hound, only he went about his work noiselessly, and not with the idea of giving tongue, such as a beagle usually shows.

"We're getting on a warm track, Chief," the boy with the torch suddenly remarked, "because just then I saw a little twig right itself under my very eyes, showing it must have been stepped on only a few minutes before. Hello! here's only one set of tracks! The man with the broken leg has drawn out!"

"But where could he have gone?" asked Tubby. "He didn't have wings, did he? And no aeroplane could dodge down in all this brush to carry him off. If he isn't on the ground, where d'ye reckon he can be, Rob?"

For answer the patrol leader gave one good look at the place where the trail of the man who dragged his left leg after him seemed to stop.

Then he quickly focused the white glow of his electric torch up into the tree directly overhead.

"Oh! looky there, would you, in the fork of the tree!" exclaimed Tubby, always bent on expressing his opinion.

And as the others cast their eyes upward, they saw the huddled figure of a man where Tubby

had indicated. Rob had undoubtedly run one of the fugitives down; and hearing them coming through the brush, he must have climbed the tree as a last resort, evidently hoping they might pass him by.

But he had not taken into consideration the fact that a scout was leading the pursuing party, and that the sudden ending of his tracks was bound to cause the trailer to survey the vicinity in the expectation of locating his game.

CHAPTER VI.

THE EAGLES LEAD THE WAY TO SUCCESS.

"Don't shoot, gents! I reckon I'm pretty near all in!" called out the man who was in the crotch of the oak tree.

At the same time he elevated both hands as a sign that he was unarmed and did not intend to offer any hostile demonstration. Undoubtedly the sight of the three big officers in blue, not to speak of four stalwart lads dressed in scout uniforms, must have convinced him that he had really run to the end of his rope; and that after being checked so positively in his break for liberty, the next best thing for him to do would be to give in and have his wounded leg attended to.

"Hello! got you, have we, Con?" remarked the Chief pleasantly.

"Looks like it, Chief," grunted the man, who must have been in considerable pain, Rob determined, as he saw the drawn look on his face. "Just gimme half a chance, and I'll drop down out of this. It ain't the easiest thing agoin' for

a man with a leg swollen up like mine to move, once he sets still five minutes."

"That's so, Con," the head of the Hampton police force said, as he stepped forward; "and I'll help you down all I can."

If Rob had had a good opinion of the burly Chief before, that added to it; because his consideration for a suffering wretch, even if he were a hard character, proved that the policeman had a heart.

The fugitive was helped to the ground, and he sank down with a half stifled groan. They could see that his face had a peaked look, and that he was compelled to grit his teeth savagely together, as though trying his best not to show signs of weakness. Yes, Con was a man of more than ordinary nerve and grit, Rob knew, as he noticed all this; but then he had made up his mind on that score before now, so he was not at all surprised.

"Corporal Merritt," he said, turning to his second in command; "suppose you take a look at this poor fellow's leg, and see if you can't do something in an emergency to ease the pain. Like as not we'll have to make a stretcher and carry him to where the wagon was left."

"All right, Rob!" was the ready answer Merritt gave; while his eyes fairly sparkled with satisfaction at having the patrol leader show such confidence in him as to turn over this duty to his charge. As a rule Rob generally took it upon himself to play the part of doctor when an occasion arose that required such work.

And imagine the astonishment of those three policemen as they saw the corporal immediately set to work to tackle his job with the assurance of an experienced physician or surgeon. As for the injured man, he stared as though hardly knowing what to believe, to see a mere boy undertake a task like that.

Tubby gave one look as Merritt unwound the rough bandage that the wounded man had wrapped tightly around his injured leg, and gasped as he turned his head away. Andy kept on staring as though fascinated; but at the same time had any one observed the boy closely he would have found that Andy's usual healthy color had given place to a ghastly hue.

If Merritt experienced anything of the same feeling as he proceeded to manipulate the limb of the man, he certainly did not let the weakness interfere with his work.

"I may hurt you some, but stand it as well as you can," he told the other. "Because I have an idea the leg may not be broken after all, but only badly wrenched and torn by striking some hard object. Steady, now!"

A minute later, as boys and officers stared, and mentally gave Merritt credit for knowing all about "first aid to the injured," the corporal went on to say:

"It is just as I thought, for there is no fracture of the bones that I can find. But you have neglected it so long and strained it so by walking and running that I'm afraid you're going to have a bad time with that leg. But I'll put something on that will ease the pain, more or less, and bind it up fresh for you. Then we'll get you to the wagon somehow, without your having to walk."

"Say, are you what they call the Boy Scouts?" asked the injured man, who had been listening to all Merritt said, as well as watching his deft fingers work, with amazement written large upon his peaked face.

"Just what we are," Tubby hastened to inform him; "and you can see now what the scouts learn. You are not the first man who has been handled by the members of the Eagle Patrol, Mister."

"Well, I wanted to know!" muttered the man, still staring, as though he could not understand how mere boys could master the art of handling a bad wound like that with such skill, and show the nerve to do it at the same time.

"Where's Rob going?" asked Tubby just then.

While Merritt was working Rob had held the torch so that he could see, until Andy had taken a hint, and scraped enough dead leaves together to make a little fire, and in this way given all the light that was needed.

Apparently the patrol leader was not satisfied with having overtaken one of the desperate fugitives who had escaped from the Riverhead jail. He must have figured, while standing there, waiting until the fire had attained sufficient size to allow his moving off, that possibly the other rascal might not have run much further, as they would surely have caught the sound of his pressing through all that dense undergrowth; for at the time Con was helped up into his tree by the shorter man, the pursuers could not have been far away.

And so the scout who carried that useful electric hand torch proceeded to find the tracks of

the second man; after which he began to follow the trail.

It immediately led him into the thickest of the underbrush; and this fact only added strength to the boy's former deduction, to the effect that no one could push on through all this matted growth without making all sorts of sounds capable of being readily heard by keen ears a quarter of a mile away almost.

Merritt had now finished bandaging the wounded leg of the man, and the fellow frankly told him it was feeling many times better already.

"You're a sure enough wonder, boy, that's what!" the man went on to say; and while he did not thank the amateur surgeon in so many words, Merritt could easily trace gratitude in the tone of his voice. However, the young corporal was not doing this in order to receive praise, but because it lay in the line of his duty as a scout.

"Got one man, anyway, Chief, didn't you?" Andy remarked.

"Half a loaf, they say, is some better than no bread," answered the big man, chuckling, as

though vastly amused over the result of this singular hunt in company with the Boy Scouts.

Before he could say anything more, there arose a series of loud "k-r-e-e-es" from the direction where the patrol leader had gone a minute or two before.

"That's Rob!" cried Tubby, all in a tremor at the thought of new developments coming on the carpet.

"And he wants us to come along!" added Andy. "Listen! There's somebody else calling out, too, and it's a gruff voice, boys. I wonder, now, if Rob's cornered the other runaway in a tree, too. Let's hurry on and see!"

They were soon all in motion, leaving the wounded man alone by the little fire, since in all probability he would never dream of attempting further flight. And Merritt did not feel like being cheated out of his share of the fun in order to stand by and watch one who was really the prisoner of the Chief.

They had little difficulty in knowing which way to move, for the racket still kept up ahead. It was found to be pretty hard work pushing through all that dense mass of ground vines, bushes, and closely growing dwarf oaks, whose

branches caught Tubby several times and almost choked him.

Once he did actually find himself gripped by the throat by one of these lower limbs, and lifted off his feet for the space of three seconds; so that ever afterward Tubby was fond of saying that he knew from actual experience just how Absalom must have felt when he was caught by his long hair and left hanging in a tree.

"Rob, oh, Rob, where are you?" called Andy, as they drew nearer to the strange sounds, which, besides spoken words, seemed to consist of the swishing of hurtling stones or clubs, and jeering laughter, all so queer that the scouts could make little or nothing of them.

For answer there was a flash, as Rob turned his torch toward them for just the space of a second; and at the same time he was heard calling close at hand:

"Here I am, just ahead of you, boys! Better look out or you'll get hit!"

"But what in the wide world is going on, Rob?" demanded Merritt, as he heard some object strike with a heavy thud among the bushes not two feet away from him.

"I'll show you what it means!" laughed Rob,

who it turned out was hiding back of a fairly large tree-trunk not five feet away. As he spoke he sent the white light of his torch straight ahead once more.

What they saw astonished them. A moving figure caught their attention, and no explanation was needed to tell the boys that this must be the shorter one of the precious pair of rogues who had broken jail, and given the authorities of Suffolk and adjoining counties such a scare.

He seemed to be groping all around him, as though trying to find more stones or fragments of broken limbs with which to bombard the patrol leader, whose presence was betrayed by the flash of his torch.

"What's he doing there; and why does he lean over like that?" called out Tubby, at the same time dodging behind a convenient tree, when he saw the man proceed to hurl a stone in their direction, following it up with a stream of hard words that told how furious he felt.

"Why, the fact is," said Rob, still laughing, as though he considered it a good joke on the fugitive, "that he got himself in the neatest trap you ever saw. In the dark and his hurry he pushed his foot into some sort of frog made of the roots

of a bush, and after that got so twisted up in the vines that if he was promised a thousand dollars for doing it, he just couldn't break away. I flashed the light on him, you see, where he was lying low, hoping we'd clear out and let him get away; and he was so mad he began to fire everything he could lay hands on at me. There's your second man, Chief. I'll hand over the job of taking him to you."

"Well, I wouldn't be afraid to wager you could do it as clever as the next one if it was up to you, son!" remarked the big officer, as he started toward the spot where the baffled fugitive crouched, looking about as furious and ugly as any one could who had been tripped up in this neat manner by ill fortune.

Of course the fellow saw that the game was up. He did not dare to offer any resistance when the Chief walked up to him and ordered him to hold out his hands. And when there came a sharp "click" that made Tubby wince, they knew that the fugitive from justice had been retaken, and that he stood a fair chance to face a judge and jury before many days.

It required considerable labor to get him free from the trap that Nature had so cruelly sprung

upon him, but in the end this was accomplished; and upon returning to where the little fire still burned, they found the wounded man lying there on the ground, as comfortably as he could, and awaiting them with an expectant look on his face.

CHAPTER VII.

TUBBY REFUSES TO FORGET.

"Too bad they got you, too, Joe!" said the wounded man; and yet there was something like satisfaction on his face, along with the grin he gave; because misery likes company, and if his companion had managed to escape it would have seemed doubly hard for him to be retaken, and badly hurt at that.

"This man isn't able to walk all the way back to the road, Chief," Rob went on to say, indicating the tall fellow, who lay there with his leg bound up the best Merritt could do with so little at hand to aid him.

"I reckon, son," returned the big officer, so pleased with the success that had come to him that he was ready to grant almost any favor these scouts asked, "we'll just have to carry him, then."

"And that would hurt him almost as much as limping along," Rob continued; "so if you hold up for a little bit, we'll try and fix a stretcher

that ought to answer; though it's going to be a mighty poor sort of thing, without even a camp hatchet to cut poles with. Get busy with me, boys, and show the Chief what you know."

Now this was one of the things in which all the Eagles had been thoroughly drilled. They knew how to go to work to make a comfortable stretcher on which an injured person might be carried for miles. But just as the patrol leader said, not having a hatchet handy was likely to prove something of a handicap. However, scouts always try to do the best they can, no matter what difficulties they run up against, and Merritt was the first to start scurrying around, looking for stout poles that would serve for the sides and handles of the stretcher.

Once more did those three police officers stand and watch what the boys were doing with both wonder and interest written on their faces. Why, they had never dreamed that half-grown lads could be so resourceful; and even after a number of fairly straight poles had been collected, calculated to bear easily the weight of the injured man, none of the men could guess just how these were to be utilized, or fastened together.

Judge of their astonishment, then, when they

saw the boys make another little side hunt and come back with strands of pliable vines that could be twisted about the poles, fastening them together, each live vine stronger three times over than a cord of the same size would have been.

Each scout took pride in being able to render his share of the work; and Rob, on his part, was filled with satisfaction to find how well things began to shape themselves under the nimble fingers of his chums and himself.

As the rude but effective stretcher began to assume its desired form, the Chief gave each of his men a nod and a wink, as though calling their attention to the clever way in which these ready lads met an emergency by "being prepared"; letting them understand, also, that a useful lesson might be drawn from the happening.

Even the two captured rogues manifested considerable interest in what was going on, the wounded fellow because he had good reason to be thankful for receiving so much consideration, and the shorter rascal because he had never been given a chance to see scouts work before.

"There's your stretcher, Chief," said Rob, when less than ten minutes had slipped by, "and it's going to answer all right, I think."

"No question about that, lad," replied the big officer; "and made so strong into the bargain that it would bear even my weight without trouble. And now let's get Con on it so we can start for the wagon."

This was quickly done. The man winced when they moved him, but other than that managed to repress all signs of his suffering. The two men accompanying the Chief took hold of the handles that had been provided, and had not the slightest trouble in walking away with the wounded rogue on the stretcher. As for the Chief, he took the other prisoner in charge. Rob walked in the van, accompanied by his chums, and tried to pick out the easiest way, always thinking of the pain that the wretched Con must be enduring every time one of the bearers stumbled over a root.

"This is what I call great work," Tubby said, as he managed to keep alongside the one who bore the torch, so that he could get the full benefit of its light; for he did not fancy going down on all fours every little while when some vine happened to be in the path.

"And I'll surely never forget this scene," Andy remarked, showing that it had made a great

impression on him. "Lots of times I'll shut my eyes, and see us all stringing along this way with that fellow laid out on the stretcher. And say, when you look around and see how these old vines hang down, you'd almost believe we were making our way through some tropical forest like lots of men we've read about."

"Well," spoke up Tubby briskly, "mebbe, now, we may be doing that same thing before a great while, if only Uncle Mark makes up his mind to send me down there to Mexico to straighten out his mixed affairs. I almost believe he would right now, if only Rob, here, was going to be along, because he's heard so much about him. And it wouldn't cost us a red cent, either, because Uncle Mark'll stand for it. But the trouble is we're bound to school right now, and can't get away, hang the luck!"

"Careful there, Tubby," warned Merritt just then; "you're getting too excited, and you don't watch your steps as you ought. That time you nearly knocked me down banging against me so suddenly."

"But aren't we nearly to the road, Rob?" pleaded Tubby, who was breathing hard, partly on account of his exertions in keeping close to

the leader, and also because he persisted in wasting so much wind in talking.

"More than half way, Tubby, so cheer up; the worst is yet to come," chuckled the patrol leader. And then as the fat scout gave a dismal groan Rob hastened to add: "That was only said for fun, because we are going to have it easier right along after this. I think in five minutes we shall come out on the road."

When about that time had expired, Rob flashed the light of his torch ahead, and then called out:

"There's the white birch that hangs over the road, boys; and the wagon is not far away from that, you remember."

"What d'ye think of that, Chief? If he didn't go and fetch us straight back to the place we started from!" Andy called out.

"That was easy," Rob told him; "because I only had to follow our own trail, you understand. And here we are!"

The horse whinnied at their approach, just as though he might have known they were friends; and possibly the poor tired beast was as hungry for a good feed of oats as animals of his class can get.

The rude stretcher, having served its purpose, was cast aside, and the wounded man made as comfortable as possible in the bed of the wagon. All of the scouts but Merritt settled themselves as best they could, as did also two of the officers. The Chief and his prisoner occupied the seat with the driver, where the recaptured rogue could be constantly watched.

In this way, then, they set out to cover the two miles or more that lay between them and Hampton. Naturally the scouts felt quite jolly over the remarkable success that had accompanied their labors of the evening.

"Well, who would have thought when the water came a-rushing into our boat, so we had to run her ashore and leave her there till morning, that we'd come on the finest chance ever to show what we knew about scoutcraft?" Andy burst out after they had been rumbling along the road steadily for a short time. Merritt had been cautioned not to try and make speed on account of the poor fellow who had hard work to repress a groan with every jolt.

"That's the way things come around, sometimes," Rob told him. "You never can tell how they're going to turn out. Lots of times I've

heard my father say that the very things he looked on as disasters proved to be blessings in disguise. And for one, I could almost forgive the fellow who played that miserable trick on us, because of the great time we've had since landing."

"Well, I don't join with you there," grumbled Tubby, who did not often hold a grudge against anybody, and therefore made his present action the more singular. "What if that plug had dropped out when we were out in the middle of the bay, with the wind and waves like they were? Wouldn't we have been in danger of our lives? I can see a feller of my size swimming a mile and more! Huh! that was a coward's trick, let me tell you. And just wait and see if I don't fasten the guilt on the wretch that played it on us. I've got all the evidence needed right here in my pocket; and given a little time, I'll fix him, —but I'm not mentioning any names *yet!*"

Both Andy and Rob pretended to consider Tubby's intention to play detective in the nature of a great joke, because they did not believe that the fat scout had any particular gift along such lines; but he certainly seemed in deadly earnest, and took himself seriously, for a fact.

"We are likely to be late to supper to-night, boys!" Rob remarked, as they saw the lights of Hampton ahead, and knew that presently they would be in the home town.

"What of that, when we've got such a splendid excuse?" Tubby said, as he puffed himself up with pride. "I know my maw and Uncle Mark'll listen a-holding their breath while I tell of all the wonderful adventures that came our way since we started after Rob's select oysters! Um! don't I wish I had a few to sample right this minute! But then, I ought to be home pretty quick now, and I guess I can hold in. Friday night we always have Boston baked beans at our house; and you know I'm particularly fond of those. And this is Friday, isn't it?"

He heaved a contented sigh, as though making up his mind that supper would taste all the finer for being held back so long; and that was Tubby's way all over.

"I'll jump out here, Chief," said Rob, as Merritt held up the horse, knowing they were close to the banker's house. "I reckon I can tote that sack of oysters such a short way. So-long, fellows; see you first thing in the morning, Merritt. I'd like mighty much to get my boat home

before that old hurricane from the West Indies comes tearing up the coast. Good night, Chief, and I'm glad we were able to lend you a hand. I hope you get a doctor busy with that swollen leg Con's carrying around with him. It'd be rough if blood poisoning set in."

So saying, the patrol leader allowed the two boys in the body of the wagon to heave the half bushel of prime shellfish over his right shoulder, and walked off with his burden as though it did not amount to much, anyway.

The cheery words of the policemen followed him; but pleasant as these may have been, it was something entirely different that caused Rob to laugh softly to himself as he heard it. And this was the shrill "k-r-e-e-e" of the Eagles, sent after him by his chums, as a token of their esteem, and in recognition of the great aid scoutcraft had proven to them during the last hour or more.

Thus closed one of the most interesting experiences that had ever fallen to the lot of the Eagle Patrol scouts; one that they would be apt to remember years afterwards, when time had caused them to forget many other adventures that had come their way. And doubtless Tubby

did keep his folks breathless while he narrated the exciting details over the supper table—after he had taken off the first sharp edge of his wonderful appetite.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DAZZLING PLAN.

Rob was up and around at daybreak the following morning, for as yet the anticipated storm had not come up the coast, and it seemed as though he might manage to get his stranded sailboat back home before the wind assumed hurricane force.

He was just starting in to have a bit of breakfast, having made the coffee, as every Boy Scout who is worth his salt is taught to do, when a cheery whistle from without announced the coming of Merritt. As it had been arranged between them that Rob would attend to the breakfast part, the Crawford boy was soon partaking of his share.

"Think we'll be able to get back with the boat?" he asked Rob, as he swallowed his hot coffee in such large quantities that the tears came into his eyes.

"I don't see why we shouldn't," answered the other; "the wind has shifted quite a lot, and once

we start we'll be able to make it with about three tacks."

"How about that hole? I don't reckon you'll spend much time fixing that now?" Merritt went on to say.

"I should guess not," laughed Rob. "If a plug that wasn't pounded in any too well in the first place held out all that time before working loose, I can fill up the hole with a fresh piece of wood that will never drop out. Besides, we can keep an eye on it. Any more coffee, Merritt?"

"I'm done, and ready to take that little spin right away. Got your sweater on, I see, Rob. You'll need it, and then some, on the boat, with this wind blowing. I've fetched along my heavy storm coat into the bargain."

"I was meaning to carry mine, you can understand," Rob rejoined, as he picked it up from the chair where he had tossed it.

As soon as both of them were mounted on their wheels, they sped away along the road in the direction of the place where the sailboat had been left. And, as there had been no unusually strong wind from a quarter that would bring the seas into the little sheltered cove, Rob had no fear that

his property could have been damaged since they abandoned it on the preceding evening.

Of course they covered the same stretch of road over which they had come while in the wagon drawn by the white nag; and, as they swung past the identical birch tree that marked the spot where the fugitives had turned into the thick undergrowth, Merritt drew the fact to his chum's attention.

"I'll never see a white birch again as long as I live," he said earnestly, "but I'll remember that one and all that happened to us around here. But that cove can't be much more than half a mile away now, Rob. Do you say the same?"

"We're bearing down on the place right now, and you'll find that it lies where that bush stands that holds its red leaves, while others are bare or brown."

"If you say so, I know it's going to be that way," returned the corporal, "because you always look out to mark things down so in your mind. Now, it never occurred to me to take any notice of what the side of the road looked like when we came out on it. I seemed to think that, because I knew that cove so well, I could find it again as easy as falling off a log; but chances are I'd have

run away over the mark, if left to myself, because I thought it was further along."

"I've found it pays always to notice things as you go," said Rob, as they jumped from their saddles and pushed the wheels ahead of them while passing along what seemed to be a trail leading toward the shore; "it saves lots of time, and you have a sort of satisfied feeling, just as if you were ready for anything."

They came directly on the cove, and found the boat just as they had left it. Of course the first thing to be done was to lower the water that was in the stern of the boat. This Merritt proceeded to do with a small pail Rob had brought along, while the other boy whittled a stick of white pine until it suited his idea of what a proper plug should be, after which he proceeded to pound it into the round hole in the bottom of the sailboat's hull.

After that they finished the job of clearing the water out, and then the boat was launched. Pushing out into deeper water, they soon had the sail up, and were buffeting the waves. Of course they lost ground until the centerboard could be used, after which they were able to make a course that would take them considerably nearer Hampton.

It was quite a wild dash, and both scouts enjoyed fighting wind and wave until, some two hours after starting, they managed to run into sheltered water, and could feel that the victory had been won.

"And none too soon, let me tell you, my boy," said Rob, as he pointed out to where the white-caps were rushing furiously along before a wind that was rapidly assuming the proportions of a storm.

"Gee whiz! but were we out in that sea?" exclaimed Merritt, as though hardly able to believe his eyes. "Why, I didn't dream it was half that rough while we were booming along. But then we had our hands full managing things, and couldn't do much looking around, could we? I'm glad it's all over. Listen to the wind howl as it cuts around the corners of the yacht club building! Looks as though we might get all the hurricane Hampton can stand before another night comes."

They did.

The weather sharps at Washington had not sent out those storm warnings without good cause, for there had never been such a wicked

gale along the south shore of Long Island at that late season of the year as this one.

Although it was Saturday and a holiday, few boys dared venture out, and then only to run from one house to another, clad in waterproofs, their heads covered with rubber capes such as duck shooters sport in rainy weather, when holding forth in their "point" blinds.

The storm raged all that night, and the following day also, doing all manner of serious damage along the South Shore, where boats were sunk, piers swept away, and even houses demolished.

On Monday morning it showed signs of abating, so that Merritt managed to get over to the Blake home. He was just in time to catch up with Tubby and Andy, who, unable to stay indoors any longer, had determined to seek company.

"Whee! isn't this the limit, though?" called out Tubby as the corporal of the Eagles came up, after being compelled to duck his head and fight against the fury of the still stiff wind.

"I hear it's done all manner of things around here," Andy remarked earnestly. "I hope, Merritt, you and Rob managed to get that boat home;

because if she's up in that cove still there won't be two sticks of her left fastened together. Why, the seas rose higher than they ever did before, so I heard, and they must have pounded in along that shore like hot cakes!"

"Oh! we managed to work her down, never fear," Merritt assured him; "and chances are she's O. K. now. Hello! Rob, we thought we'd step in and see how you all managed to hold out through the storm!"

"No damage done at our house; but I heard that the poor old Academy got caught again," the patrol leader remarked.

At which Andy threw up his hands, exclaiming,

"Don't tell me it was burned again, after the other bad blaze that let us out of school long enough for some of you fellows to run down to Panama, and have all kinds of fun!"

"No fire this time, but wind and rain," Rob said soberly. "Why, they say the whole roof was carried two hundred yards away, so that the rain beat in, and played hob with everything! The Academy is next door to a ruin right now. It begins to look as if we might have to be given

another long vacation till they get a new roof on; and that may be a month, perhaps two!"

The three boys who heard this interesting news somehow did not seem to feel particularly sorry. Indeed, as soon as he could find his voice, Tubby burst out into a regular cowboy yell.

"Hooray! that means we'll have a chance to take Uncle Mark at his word if so be he wants the lot of us to hike down there over the Rio Grande, and see what can be done with his cattle on that ranch in Mexico! Again I say, 'Hooray for everybody.' Oh! say, tell me about that, won't you? It sounds too good to be true, Rob! Are you dead sure that that accommodating new roof went sailing away? And did it land two hundred yards off? Wouldn't I have liked to be around to see her go, though! And it will surely take the carpenters six weeks or two months to get a new one on and the rooms fixed over. Talk about luck, it never rains but it pours!"

"Yes," said Rob, laughing at the extravagant actions and words by means of which Tubby tried to express his joy; "we've just seen it pour the worst ever. If an inch fell on poor old Hampton, I'd say there was a foot solid came down;

and without a roof on top, the inside of the Academy must look pretty tough."

"But about this queer old uncle of yours, Tubby, how is it we never met him?" inquired Merritt. "Tell us all about him, won't you? He must be some traveler; because I heard you say once he'd just been nearly a year in Africa exploring over the course Livingstone and Stanley took a long while back."

"Why," Tubby immediately started in to say, "Uncle Mark Matthews is a brother of my mother. He's always been a queer sort of fish, crazy about hunting orchids, and all that sort of stuff, you know. Spent years and years down in tropical South America, where no white man had ever been before; and has a whole raft of strange plants, birds, butterflies and what-not named after him. He settled down in Mexico some years ago, and got together quite a respectable lot of prize cattle on a ranch that's in the northern part of the country. And that is where a lot of this fighting business has been going on between the rebels under Villa and the troops of Huerta, now playing his little part as president of the republic.

"About a year or more ago it seems that Un-

cle Mark got the old fever on him again; and this time it was Africa that called him. He wanted to do something big over there before he found himself too old, he says. Anyway, he put his ranch in charge of a man he believed he could trust with things, even if he was a greaser; and away he cut for the heart of the Dark Continent.

"Well, he came near losing his life there, dying of the jungle fever, or some kind of thing like that; and when, after a hard fight, he managed to reach the coast, heading for America, first thing he heard was that there were hot times all around where his prize ranch was located; and also that if his bunch of cattle worth a fortune hadn't been confiscated yet, they'd soon be lost to him. It seems that Uncle Mark has lost a good part of the big pile he once owned, and if this ranch was sacked he'd be in a bad hole; and that is what is worrying him right now.

"If it is going to be saved at all, somebody has just got to go down there and do the business; and Uncle Mark is too sick a man to dream of trying it. That's why he's been talking to me as he has. You see, ordinarily he wouldn't think of entrusting such a risky job to a boy of

my age; but ever since he's come to Hampton he's been hearing about what clever chaps the Boy Scouts are, and particularly you, Rob, and Merritt, here; and he told me again last night that if only it might be fixed so you could go along—yes, and you, too, Andy, don't think I'd leave you out of this deal—he'd hand the whole business over to me to handle. And let me tell you, it looks like things might be shaping that way right now, when you give me to understand, Rob, that the Academy is a wreck, and that there can't be any school for six or eight weeks. And that's why I'm tickled to death, and feel like throwing my hat over the church steeple with joy. Because, don't you see, fellers, it's going to mean a glorious trip for the whole four of us, a chance to see what Mexico looks like in war times, and perhaps even an opportunity to run across some of the natives who are doing all the fighting!"

But Rob looked serious, as though there were things that he wanted explained before he could consent to consider such a wild goose chase.

CHAPTER IX.

FIGURING IT ALL OUT.

"Just hold your horses a bit, Tubby; you're going so fast I'm afraid you'll break your neck," Rob told the fat boy. "Why, nobody ever saw you half so excited in all your life as you are now."

"Well, who wouldn't be, when everything is rooting for us to make that lovely trip down to the land of sunshine, where there is something doing every minute of the time right now?" Tubby declared. "And all I hope is, first, that this rumor about the school roof taking wings and blowing away doesn't turn out to be a fizzle; and, second, that you will make up your mind to go along with me, Rob. Because I'm banking on the rest falling all over themselves to sneeze if only you take snuff. That right, fellers?"

"You've got it down pretty pat, Tubby," chuckled Merritt.

"Yes," added Andy, "you know mighty well that if Rob and you say 'go,' the rest of us

couldn't be held back with wild horses. That is, always providing our folks give us permission, and I think they will when they know how much the trip means to your poor uncle."

"There, Rob, see that?" cried Tubby eagerly. "What's doing now?"

"Before I say a word one way or the other," Rob told him, "there are heaps of questions I want answered. Perhaps you can tell us a part of the story; but we'd have to see Uncle Mark, and hear the rest. Get that, Tubby?"

"Sure I do, Rob, and you'll find me only too willing to accommodate all I can. Fire away, now, and I'll try and put you wise to the facts," and the fat boy threw himself into Rob's easy-chair, elevating one leg over an arm, and assuming the air of a witness in the box ready to be cross-questioned by the lawyer on the other side.

"Tell us something more about your uncle first of all," said Rob, just as if he might have a long list of questions on a slip of paper, which he meant to put to the other.

"About his life, do you mean, or just that part of it connected with Mexico?" demanded Tubby.

"We haven't the time to stand for it all," observed Rob; "because such a wonderful man as your uncle must have run across more queer things than we read about in Baron Munchausen or the Arabian Nights, he's been such a great traveler and explorer. So just strike in where he made up his mind to settle down on a Mexican ranch, and sent to England to import a fine breed of cattle to improve the native stock. That was how long ago, Tubby?"

"From what he told me I guess it might have been six or seven years back; but that doesn't matter so very much. He bought a big tract of good land, and put up his ranch buildings; after which he got his stock together and started raising the best brand of cattle ever known in Northern Mexico, shipping his beef, on the hoof, of course, over the border to the United States market."

"That was when Diaz was president of Mexico," Rob remarked. "Now, how did your uncle get along with the Government at that time? I want to know, because it's going to cut a big figure with us when we get down there—if we ever do."

"Why, to tell you the truth, I don't believe Un-

cle Mark cared much for President Diaz, because he had lots of trouble at times with the people in power. And later on, when Madero went into Mexico to turn things upside-down, I guess uncle helped him a whole lot. Anyway, I've heard him say he admired Madero a heap, and that they were good friends. Why, after Diaz lit out for Spain, Uncle Mark was so dead sure things would run smooth down there that he left his ranch in charge of a man he believed he could trust, and started on the trip to Africa that he'd been staving off for ever so long. And he says he must have just missed the news that Madero had been killed, and that another president was in the chair. If he'd known that, he would never have made his dive into the heart of Africa, but hurried back home."

"Then he looks on Huerta as anything but a friend; is that it?" asked Rob.

"He's afraid the present Government is following along the same paths Diaz made, and that everybody who was hand in glove with Madero must come under the ban," Tubby went on to say with considerable importance, as though he might be coining some of these phrases himself,

when, truth to tell, he only repeated them, parrot-like, after his uncle.

"Now, that's something we would have to know," said Rob. "But tell us, has your uncle had any word from his ranch since he came back?"

"Not a whisper," Tubby assured him. "You see, things are in such a whirl down over the border right now that letters never get to their destinations; and as for a wire message being delivered, it isn't possible in a year."

"Then Uncle Mark doesn't know whether he has any cattle left on his ranch to-day, or if it's just a howling wilderness, with every beef run off, and the buildings burned to the ground. Is that the way it stands, Tubby?"

"Er—yes, I suppose it is," admitted the fat scout slowly. "And you see, it's to find out the truth, for one thing, that he wants somebody to go down there and cross over into Mexico. Then, if everything is lovely and the goose hangs high, that messenger will be given authority to dispose of every head of cattle so as to fetch as big a fistful of money back here as he can."

Rob shook his head, while the other three who were eagerly watching his face looked keenly

disappointed. The signs seemed to point to an adverse decision in the matter by the patrol leader.

"It appears to be even worse than what I called it first—a wild goose chase," Rob presently pursued. "For months and months now there have been all kinds of fighting around that section of country, if half we see in the papers is true: first with the Government forces ahead, and then the rebels clearing out everything, so that a hostile army couldn't live off the land. It was just as Sheridan was ordered to do in the Valley of the Shenandoah, you remember. If the army of Huerta didn't carry off your uncle's prize stock, you can make sure the hungry rabble of that rebel general, Villa, must have gobbled it up long ago."

"Oh! but there is where uncle says he has his strongest hold!" exclaimed Tubby, his round face lighting up again with new hope.

"I'm glad to hear he's got a string out somewhere, then," Rob remarked. "Suppose you tell us what you mean by that?"

"Why, he knows General Villa real well," Tubby went on. "Fact is, he met him some years ago when he was only a bandit, fighting against

the Díaz Government, because they'd gone and set a price on his head. It's too long a story to tell you now, Rob, but the fact is that my uncle, who used to be a pretty fine surgeon once on a time before he got this exploring bee in his head, saved the life of Villa!"

"He did, eh?" exclaimed the patrol leader, apparently beginning to take new interest in the matter. "That sounds as though there might be a slim chance for those herds to be left alone. Go on and tell us some more, Tubby."

"Villa was badly hurt, and uncle took him to his house and nursed him back to life again, knowing who he was all the while; because, as I said before, uncle didn't have any too much love for the party that was in power just then. And Villa told him he would never forget what uncle had done for him; that if he could do him a favor any time all uncle had to do was to speak. So that is what he's hoping will turn out in his favor; that General Villa, remembering how he was treated so well at the ranch, would put a guard over the place and keep his men from raiding it, under the belief that uncle must return home before long. Oh, Uncle Mark is building

big hopes on the gratitude of the man whose life he saved long ago!"

"I must say it does look some hopeful," Rob mused, as though trying to convince himself along those lines; for a trip to the South did look mighty alluring to him, if only he could believe it was not a foolish errand that took them to the sorely troubled land of the Montezumas.

"And I forgot to tell you this," Tubby continued breathlessly. "Just as you read so often in stories of the old-time days, the bandit Villa gave my uncle a queer ring which he wears all the time, and told him that if that ring was ever brought to him he would go far out of his way to help the person who fetched it!"

When Tubby burst out with this new bombardment, Rob threw up his hands as if he must capitulate on the spot.

"That seems to clinch matters like a nail driven through a board, Tubby," he went on to say.

"Oh! then you mean you'll go; is that it, Rob?" exclaimed the fat boy, scrambling out of the easy-chair, and landing on his feet with his short legs spread out as though they were a letter A.

Rob smiled.

"It's too soon to settle the thing like that,

Tubby; but I want to tell you that after hearing all you've had to say, I must admit there's a chance of my falling in with your scheme. It's a glorious outlook so far as the trip goes. The trouble will be to get in touch with General Villa with that country fairly swarming with guerillas and bandits of all kinds, not to speak of the rebels themselves."

"What will you do about it, Rob?" pleaded Tubby. "Because you know time is going to count for a whole lot with us. Just as soon as we know for sure that there will not be any school till long after Christmas, we ought to be starting. It's going to take some days to get down there, and across the Rio Grande."

"Well, first, you must take us all to see your uncle so he can give us more information. We shall need it all, depend on that," Rob told him, laying one finger on the palm of his left hand as he checked things off. "Then I want to talk it all over with dad, though somehow I don't seem to fear any serious opposition from that quarter, because he's so good to me, and has such a lot of faith in my being able to come out of any scrape right-side up. Last of all, I mean to put

it up to our scout-master, Mr. Alec Sands, and get his advice."

Hampton Troop of Boy Scouts now had a regular scout master, as the rules of the organization demanded. He was a bright young man of about twenty-five, who, while not very well acquainted with the secrets of the Big Outdoors, as were some of the scouts, did know boys from the ground up; and he was deeply interested in everything that went for the betterment of the rising generation. Some time before, Rob had received his certificate from Headquarters in New York City, and was qualified to serve as assistant scout master in the absence of the real leader of the troop; for only a first-class scout may fill this position, and then only after he has been endorsed by the scout commissioner of the district, as well as the local council.

"Well," said Tubby, scratching his head dubiously, "I only hope, then, that our Mr. Sands don't put the kibosh on the whole fine game by saying there's too big a risk about it for us to undertake. I don't see why that should be, when every day you read about scouts doing all sorts of wonderful things,—rescuing folks from burning buildings, stopping runaway horses at the

risk of their lives, and such brave deeds that get them medals from Headquarters. This means a whole lot to my uncle, and to my folks; for whatever he owns will come to us if he should die; and let me say this right now—if the rest of you back out, Tubby Hopkins will make the try all by himself. You hear me talking, don't you?"

"That sounds pretty strong, Tubby," remarked Rob, smiling, yet in secret admiring the undaunted spirit that caused the stout boy to make this positive declaration; "but suppose you take us right now to see your uncle; that may settle it once and for all!"

CHAPTER X.

HOW THE LAND LAY.

Upon hearing Rob speak so favorably of the scheme, Tubby grinned, and gave both of the other scouts a sly wink, as much as to say: "See how you can get there by keeping everlastingly at it?" That was the fat boy's best quality: persistence. If he failed to reach his aim twenty times he was apt to proceed to try again and again until success rewarded him.

"Then come along over home with me and have a talk with Uncle Mark!" he told the patrol leader as he began to hunt all around for his hat, which he often mislaid. He was finally informed coolly by Andy that it was perched on his head, as he had forgotten to remove it when entering Rob's den!

So the four hurried out. Signs of the late storm's fury could be seen in every direction. Great limbs had been torn from some of Hampton's finest trees; chimneys had been demolished in several places; and it was not hard to believe

that at the climax of the hurricane the new roof of the Academy had been carried off.

First of all, Rob said they should satisfy themselves that this report was true; so they joined the crowds that were heading for the school grounds. When the boys saw what a wreck the storm had made of the building, none of them doubted any longer that a vacation period was bound to result. And strange to say, while some of the town fathers walked around, viewing the damage with long faces, knowing how heavily it would cost to repair the school, nobody saw a single boy looking glum!

"That's one point settled, anyhow," Andy remarked gleefully, as they all turned away, heading for the Hopkins' home.

"And say, Mexico looks a whole lot closer to me, don't you know?" Tubby chirped, with such a happy look on his rosy face that any one might have thought he was on the eve of starting on a picnic instead of a serious undertaking. But, then, boys never see the dark side of things, such is the enthusiasm and optimism of youth.

"Too bad about one thing, Tubby, if so be you get away on this journey," remarked Andy, giving Merritt a wink as he spoke.

"What's that, Andy, you're hinting about?" asked the other.

"It's going to knock your fine plans silly; about searching every tool chest in town, you know, and finding the brace and nicked bit that chawed a hole through the bottom of Rob's sailboat," the bugler of the Eagles went on to say.

Tubby looked somewhat glum, and shrugged his plump shoulders ruefully.

"Say, that's a fact, fellers," he remarked dolefully; "and I'd sure set my heart on finding out the miscreant, and exposing him to his face. Such a smart idea of mine it was, too, finding that shaving with the tell-tale mark! But if I don't get a chance to spy around between now and the time we leave Hampton, I'll keep it in mind. And every time I look at that incriminating bit of evidence, I'll renew my vow to place the guilt on the shoulders where it belongs just as soon as I get back home after a successful trip."

Tubby, when he wanted to, could appear very eloquent, and use some of the longest words in the dictionary. Fortunately these periods did not crop up very often, or his chums would not have

stood for such airs. Andy pretended to feel faint as it was, and begged Merritt to fan him.

"All I can say about the matter is that I'm sorry for the fellow who bored that hole through my boat," Rob remarked; "because when once Tubby sets his mind on anything it's bound to come, sooner or later. But here we are at your house; and now to meet Uncle Mark."

Three minutes later they were all sitting around a small, dark-featured gentleman, who wore a big pair of goggles and looked as though he might be pretty sick. This was Uncle Mark. The fever he had contracted in the hot depths of the African jungles had taken such a hold upon his system that he began to despair of ever being able to travel again; and he had sought his sister's home as a haven of refuge in his last days.

He seemed to guess about what the three scouts had come to see him; which would indicate that Tubby had done considerable talking, even to promising that he would coax the others to join him in making the trip to the country south of the Rio Grande.

As Rob went over pretty much the same ground as when he was questioning Tubby, it would hardly pay us to repeat what passed be-

tween Uncle Mark and the boys for the first half hour of the conference. Of course the old traveler was able to go further into details; and some of his descriptions of those warm times when he first met Villa, the bandit, thrilled his young hearers.

"Some people might think it a very unwise thing for me to try and induce a party of mere lads to start down into that sorely distressed and torn-up country just now on such a strange errand," Uncle Mark said after a while; "but I've considered everything carefully, and I actually believe you would have a far better chance for success than if I entrusted the mission to a man, who would be sure to get mixed up with some of the rival factions and lose out. Besides, I've become very much interested in the aims of Boy Scouts since I've come to Hampton; and some of the things you Eagles have done fairly made my heart go out to you. I believe that if anybody can make a success of this errand you can."

Naturally enough such words of warm praise made the scouts feel drawn toward the broken down old traveler and explorer more than ever. Uncle Mark had seen such a host of remarkable things during his roving life that this fact alone

would endear him to all boys who had red blood in their veins. And scouts in particular, with their love for outdoors and the myriad secrets of the wilderness, might be expected to feel warmly toward one who had camped for months amidst the savage tribes of Africa, hunted through the tropical forests of South America in search of new orchids, and lived the free life of an explorer.

Still Rob went on asking questions, for he knew that they could not have too much information concerning the country they meant to visit, and the people they must meet there.

All of them examined the quaint ring that Uncle Mark passed around, which, as he said, General Villa had given him years ago. At that time the present leader of the rebel forces in Northern Mexico was looked on as a hunted bandit, with a price set on his head by President Diaz.

"Should you conclude to undertake this mission, Rob," the old gentleman went on to say, with an anxious, almost pleading look on his face, "which I earnestly hope may be the case, I mean to put this ring on your finger, because I suppose you are to be the leader. When you want

to prove to General Villa that you come direct from his old friend, Doctor Matthews, all you have to do is to show him that; and if he is the man of his word that I firmly believe him to be, there is nothing he can do for you that he will refuse. But more than that, I expect to entrust you with a letter to him, written in Spanish, but also translated for your benefit. In it I shall ask him to dispose of all my cattle, if they are still safe, to the best advantage possible, and to send me the proceeds by you, as I am in a bad state and shall need the money. Is that plain, boys?"

"It couldn't be more so, sir," Rob assured him.

"And now, after you have heard all that I can tell you, what do you think about undertaking the expedition for me?" continued the other eagerly. Tubby gripped the sides of his chair and held his breath, waiting for Rob to settle the important question then and there.

Rob was too diplomatic to do so off-hand. He knew that several things had to be taken into consideration before they could think of assenting.

"All I can say just now is this, Dr. Matthews," he remarked. "I'm for going, now that I under-

stand things better, and know that there is really some sort of chance that your cattle have been guarded, because of this friendship for you on the part of Villa; and you tell us that he is a man who never forgets a friend. But before we can say positively that we'll undertake the job, we shall have to see what the home folks have to say about it."

"Of course. I expected that, Rob," the gentleman went on; "and if any of you meet with opposition, please send the fathers or mothers over to see me, and I'll try my best to win them to your way of thinking. It means everything to me, because that ranch is all I've got left in the wide world; and I put over a hundred thousand dollars into it."

"Oh! so far as my father is concerned, sir," Rob assured him, "I'm pretty sure there'll be little talking needed to make him see it in the right light; because he's the finest dad on all Long Island, and he believes in me from the word go. Merritt, here, has a coaxing way about him that generally gets what he wants from his father, who is the jolliest big man you ever saw wield a sledge. About Andy I'm not so sure; but if there is going to be no school for two

months, and his father learns that the rest of us are going, I have hopes that he will say yes."

"And I know he will!" exclaimed the bugler of the troop positively. "Because he believes that scouts can take care of themselves anywhere. Since I joined the Eagles I've shown so much improvement, he says, that there is really nothing he would refuse me that was in reason."

"Which shows that your father is a sensible man," remarked Uncle Mark; "and I hope to meet him before long. But how soon can all this be settled, Rob? Because every day counts terribly now. If my cattle have been spared all these months, it may be that General Villa, believing I never mean to return to Mexico, and needing money to buy supplies for his troops, may feel that he has done all that could be asked of him, and yield to the pressure. Yes, a day might turn the scales, and lose me all my valuable stock. Make it as short a delay as you can, please, Rob."

"Oh! we'll settle that this very night, sir," replied the patrol leader promptly. "It has always been a habit of mine not to let the grass grow under my feet. And if things turn out right,

why, I can see no reason why we shouldn't make a start—by, say, to-morrow afternoon!"

"Hurray!" cried Tubby, dancing around the room; while his mother, who had come in to hear what was being said, hardly knew whether to look pleased or worried. To have her only boy leave home on such an errand was enough to cause any mother considerable anxiety.

Both Merritt and Andy grinned, as though the prospect pleased them greatly. What scout could help feeling delighted over such a chance for visiting a country about which they had been reading so much as they had of Mexico lately? That the unhappy republic was in the throes of civil war did not seem to appal them at all; for never having experienced any of the horrors of such a conflict, they could not realize what it meant.

Uncle Mark could understand all about it, though; but he was so anxious to find out about his ranch, and had such blind faith in the ability of these clever scouts to take care of themselves under any and all conditions, that he shut his eyes to the possibility of their coming to harm.

And that was about the last word; for presently Rob and his chums said good-bye to the

sick man, who shook hands with each scout, and said he would continue to hope they might decide to undertake the mission of trying to save the last valuable possession he had in the wide world. After which they went out to talk it all over again, and lay plans as to what their program would be in case every obstacle were cleared away and they saw an open door beyond them.

"Well," said Rob finally; "if we do go we'll have our hands full getting ready to skip out to-morrow; so Merritt, you and Andy had better see how the land lies with your fathers; while I wait for mine to come home at noon. Here's hoping you'll have the best of luck!"

CHAPTER XI.

"THEY'RE OFF!"

It would have been hard to find any busier boys in all Hampton that morning than the four scouts who have figured so prominently in this story. And about one o'clock of the same day the telephone was kept employed carrying messages from house to house.

In fact, Rob had hardly left the lunch table when he heard a ring, and upon lifting the receiver to his ear, immediately recognized the excited voice of Andy.

"Rob, is that you? Say, it's all right, and I'm going along!"

"Oh! you didn't have to say more than one word to tell me that," answered the patrol leader with a laugh. "Why, the minute you opened your mouth you gave it all away. But I'm mighty glad you convinced your folks, Andy."

"At first father looked kind of glum, and shook his head as though he wouldn't hear of such a thing," continued the other joyously. "But I took

your advice, and just started in to tell the whole yarn. I could see his face keep getting lighter the further I went, till at the end he shook me by the hand, and says he: 'Andy, I don't mean to refuse you any reasonable thing; and while I'll worry a lot if you go down there to that troubled country, still, it's in a good cause. And if Mrs. Hopkins, Mr. Blake, and Mr. Crawford give their sons permission, I reckon I'll have to do the same. I've found that scouts learn how to take care of themselves no matter where they happen to be!' And so that's settled. How about you?"

"Oh! there wasn't any trouble," replied Rob proudly. "Dad asked me a lot of questions, and then said he was willing to trust me anywhere. He's the finest dad that ever lived, barring none! Now, we're only waiting to hear from Merritt."

"Well, you won't have to wait long, then," said a hearty voice just over Rob's shoulder; and glancing up he saw the other chum, who had reached the door of the room unobserved, even while the excited confab over the wire was in progress.

"There's no need of my asking what luck you've had, Merritt, my boy," chuckled Rob,

"because you carry the map on your face. It's all right, do I hear you say?"

"I should say, yes," hastily replied the other with a happy grin that told how much his boyish heart was wrapped up in this grand project.

"Why, I didn't have any trouble at all. Father simply said that while he hardly approved of four lads like us going down into that country where neighbor was warring with neighbor, and everything torn upside-down, still, it would be a shame if Tubby's old uncle, whom he has met, should lose all he had when there was a chance to save it. And so he told me that if the other boys received permission to go, he wouldn't throw anything in the way. You know, Rob, father has a heap of respect for the opinion of your dad."

"Good for you, Merritt," Rob rejoined. "I've been talking with Andy, and everything is lovely over there at his house. I'm holding the wire, and just wait till I tell him to come over here on the jump. He'd better pick up Tubby on the way, because we want to talk things over once more, so as to know just what we ought to take along with us."

This was speedily arranged; and within ten

minutes the other two members of the Eagle Patrol bustled in, out of breath with the exertion they had put forth in order to save time.

Then the tongues began to wag, and all sorts of suggestions came thick and fast. It seemed as though everybody had been thinking up ideas, as well as getting new ones from outsiders, mostly fellow members of the troop to whom the subject of the great expedition was mentioned.

"My father advised that we go well armed," said Merritt; "not that we would expect to use our guns against anybody, unless in the last pinch; but he says there are ferocious wild beasts down in that country, and he wouldn't feel easy to have us there with just a camp hatchet and our staves along for defense."

"How about that, Tubby? Did you happen to ask Uncle Mark whether we'd be likely to run across any grizzly bears or panthers or big game like that?" inquired Andy.

"Just what I did, because you know my mother said she was worried about my being gobbled up by a pack of hungry wolves," replied the fat scout.

"Guess they would pick you out first pop!" struck in Andy, chuckling.

"Which would show their good taste," Tubby informed him, without hesitating a second. "But uncle admitted that we might run across wild beasts of prey if we had to make much of a detour to avoid the Federal troops that are combing the country back of Ciudad Juarez, on the Rio Grande just opposite El Paso on the Texas side."

"Did he happen to say what kind of animals?" asked Rob.

"Oh! any old kind. There are wolves and coyotes on the plains, and in the desert; jaguars among the hills; and sometimes even a bear is run across, though not often. But my opinion is we'll have ten times as much worry about rebels and Federal soldiers and some of the Mexican bandits like that Castillo crowd we've read so much about in the papers the last few months."

"I think myself that you hit the target in the bull's-eye that time, Tubby," was Merritt's way of expressing his opinion.

"Well, it's settled then," added Rob, "that we go armed. Every fellow will have to carry some sort of a gun; and if you don't happen to own one, borrow it. Be sure to have some ammunition along, because we mightn't be able to get

the kind we need down there. Now, let's make out a list of things we'll want with us. Of course we wouldn't think of carrying a tent, because we don't mean to have a pack train along, and we'll have to move in a hurry lots of times."

"But what if it rains like all get-out?" questioned Tubby, who did not altogether like the idea of getting his brand new khaki suit water-soaked the first thing.

"Oh! don't bother about such a little thing as that," Merritt told him, with a snort of scorn. "What sort of scouts would we be if we couldn't fix up some sort of shelter against rain? And even if we didn't, none of us are made of salt, are we? Anyway, I don't believe it rains much down there around Chihuahua, because a heap of the territory is only desert; and it wouldn't be that if it had showers, you understand."

By degrees they settled upon what they should take along. Tubby was for loading himself down with such a raft of stuff,—all of which might come in very handy, but could never be carried without breaking the back of his horse,—that Rob finally made out a slip for him, and insisted that he should not pack up more than those essential things contained on the paper.

"I'm going to take my fountain pen along, anyhow," grumbled Tubby, as though determined to carry some article that was not on the list. "And I bet, Rob, you'll be wanting to borrow it at every city where we stop for ten minutes, to address post cards to somebody in Hampton, like you did the time we went to Panama."

Of course that sly allusion caused a laugh on the part of Merritt and Andy, while Rob turned a bit red in the face.

"Oh! have your fun if you want to, fellows," the patrol leader said, as though he were proof against their prodding. "I acknowledge that I did send a few cards to Lucy Mainwaring that time; yes, and I calculate to do the same again. Just think up some nice girl, each of you, and invest a few dimes that way yourself. It's lots of fun looking them over afterward, when she's got them so neatly pasted in her post card album."

"Well," Merritt proposed, "now that we know what's what, hadn't we better scatter and get busy? There's an awful lot to be done between now and night, looking over our clothes, having this fixed, or that button sewed on. Suppose we

get together after supper and report progress. How would my house do?"

"I'll be on deck, never fear," Tubby announced promptly.

"Look for me about half-past seven, Merritt," Andy told him.

"Sorry, fellows," Rob put in, with a shrug of his shoulders and a whimsical smile on his face; "I'll have to plead a previous engagement."

"Oh! sure you do," jeered Andy; "and it'd be a shame to ask you to break it for such a little thing as this. But the rest of us'll be around, Merritt. No need of worrying about Rob, anyhow, because we know he'll have everything in ship-shape style long before our train leaves."

After that the meeting was dissolved, and three of the lads hurried away to start packing their duffel according to arrangements, getting it in as small a compass as possible.

They were frequently interrupted by other boy friends, calling to find out if this startling rumor had any truth back of it. The visitors asked unlimited questions, while they loudly bewailed their hard luck in not getting a chance to accompany the four fortunate ones.

Sim Jeffords and Hiram Nelson, indeed, went

so far as to threaten jokingly to start a rival expedition, and clean out all the rebels and Regulars in the Mexican State of Chihuahua. While Fred Mainwaring, Lucy's brother, who was at home at this time, boldly declared he had half a mind to buy a ticket through to El Paso and wait for the four scouts there, in hopes of thus forcing them to take him on.

In the town it became a subject of common talk, and all sorts of ideas were passed around concerning this new and most extraordinary scheme of the scouts. Some people who were not in love with the organization, like old Hiram Applegate, the farmer who had caused the boys so much trouble in a previous story, openly scoffed at the idea of half-grown lads undertaking such a risky mission. He said their parents must be crazy to allow it; but when casual mention was made of his own wild son, Jared, who had gone rapidly to the bad, and had not been heard from since his misdeeds at Panama came near getting him into trouble with the United States Government, Hiram suddenly remembered he had an engagement elsewhere.

Even the old-time enemies of the Eagles, Max Ramsay, Hodge Berry, and a few of the members

of the rival Hawk Patrol, investigated the exciting news, and tried to prove to their own satisfaction that the people of Hampton were prejudiced in favor of Rob Blake and his crowd, because all sorts of splendid things seemed to be continually coming their way. They were wilfully blind to the fact that the boys of the Eagle Patrol had surely deserved all the good fortune that had been showered upon them thus far. This was because they had set their standard high, and tried to conform to the rules that govern the scout movement.

That was a long night to four boys at least in Hampton. At noon on the following day a great crowd gathered at the station to see them leave for New York, where they expected to take the night train for the Far Southwest. Rob and his three chums felt their hearts beat a lively tattoo as they saw the faces of home folks and patrol comrades among those present.

As the train pulled out of the station amidst loud shouts and good wishes, and waving hats and handkerchiefs, the boys could distinguish one sound that thrilled them to the core, and made them remember the vows they had taken always to be true scouts.

This was the shrill "k-r-e-e-e" of the Eagles, given in concert by the other members of the patrol to which all of the travelers belonged; and the last thing they saw as they leaned from the windows was the swarm of campaign hats that went flying up into the air.

Then, as the scene was blotted out in the cloud of fine sand raised by the train, the four boys, thus boldly starting on a long and hazardous journey in quest of Uncle Mark's last remnant of his fortune, sank back in their seats and just looked at each other, too overcome to say a single word. Behind lay home and all the dear ones; while beyond was the land of revolution and turmoil—Mexico!

CHAPTER XII.

ALONG THE RIO GRANDE.

"Here we are coming into El Paso at last!" called out Rob, as he started to get his various bundles together, so as to leave the train that had carried them over the last part of their long and tiresome journey across the whole of Texas.

"And I'm about as happy to hear that as if you'd told me I was made a first class scout, and could hang the whole badge on my sleeve, where now I only sport the lower half, 'Be Prepared!' " cried Tubby, also getting busy.

The boys had some time before been warned that they were nearing their objective point on the American side of the border stream known as the Rio Grande. Tubby loudly declared that he could not see anything so very grand about the river; that they had wider creeks up North than this seemed to be, away up here so far away from the Gulf.

When they alighted they stared around them, naturally, because strange sights at once began to meet their eyes, accustomed to other types of people. A great crowd stood around, in which were khaki-clad United States regulars off duty; cowboys; Mexicans with swarthy faces, both men and women; Indians with their curios for sale in the shape of finely-woven baskets and pottery of gaudy hues; and many other classes of people besides.

Of course the four lads came in for return stares, and they could well understand that, for doubtless they were the very first Boy Scouts to drop in on El Paso. Many persons at once believed that they must be new recruits for the army. These observers remarked to one another that things had come to a pretty pass when Uncle Sam found it necessary to enlist half-grown boys in the service, now that it looked as though intervention in Mexico must come about sooner or later.

Rob, however, paid little attention to curious looks. He went about his business with the air of one who had all his plans well matured, and knew just what must be done first.

Asking a few questions, he was directed to a

sort of hotel. When they had reached it, it did not strike Tubby as giving much promise of good "feeds"; and he did not hesitate to express that opinion when they were alone in the big room with its two beds that had been assigned to them.

"We don't expect to stay here more than the one night," Rob told him; "only to get rested up and be in shape to start across the bridge there after we've purchased horses and found a guide who can run off greaser talk. So I wouldn't make any more row if I were you, Tubby."

"We'll see that you get enough to eat if that is what worries you," Merritt went on to say consolingly; and at that the fat scout managed to smile a little.

"Well," he remarked with a sigh, "if the rest of you can stand for it, I guess I'll just have to, that's all. But, jiminy crickets, things look pretty shady after coming straight from a nice clean home!"

"You'll have to put up with lots worse than that, Tubby; so cheer up," said Andy. "And now, what is the first thing on the program, Rob?"

"Clean up the best we can, and rest till after we've had our dinner," the other advised. "Then

we'll try to get an interview with the commander of the forces here, and see what he thinks we'd better do."

"Huh! like as not he'll tell us we must not dream of venturing across to the other side, unless General Villa happens to be in Juarez right now, which I reckon would be too good luck," Tubby replied disconsolately. "And I hope, Rob, that if he does talk that way he won't influence you to call it all off. Think what silly guys we'd feel like, starting back home without even making a try to invade Mexico!"

"Don't let that keep you on edge, Tubby," the patrol leader told him; "you ought to know me by this time, and that I never give up a thing I've set my mind on till the last horn blows. We've started on this business of your Uncle Mark's; and we'll see it through, or know the reason why!"

"Hurray! them's my sentiments!" exclaimed Andy, and even Merritt waved his hand above his head, as though he fully agreed with the other comrades; so Tubby was able to appear at ease once more, as a great load had been removed from his heart.

When they had partaken of a wretched din-

ner that made Tubby look quite blue because there was hardly a thing that seemed to taste right, the four boys started out to look the border town over. They cast frequent glances across the guarded bridge connecting El Paso with the Mexican shore of the river, and finally asked of a passing soldier the way to headquarters.

Already they had learned who was in command at El Paso at that time, and had even glimpsed the general at a distance. It happened that they found the commander at leisure, which was a wonder, for he had his hands full during these troublous times trying to keep the peace, when there were so many chances of Americans and Mexicans coming into armed conflict along the river for miles.

The officer looked them over as they were ushered into the room. Rob had been wise enough to send in a note telling who they were, and that they wished to consult him on a very important piece of business.

"So, you are the four Boy Scouts whose arrival created so much furor, are you?" the general asked, as he frankly held out his hand toward Rob, whom he immediately recognized as the leader. Perhaps this was due to Rob's man-

ner of carrying himself; or else to the fact that he wore his badge upon his left shoulder, showing that he was a scout master, and hence in command. Soldiers have quick eyes to catch these things that might slip past an ordinary citizen.

"We are Boy Scouts, General," Rob replied; "but we did not know that our coming to El Paso had made more than a ripple. My name is Rob Blake; this is Corporal Merritt Crawford; the one next him is Andy Bowles, our bugler; and this last member goes by the name of Tubby Hopkins!"

The officer in command at the border town shook hands warmly with each of the boys. He tried his best not to smile as he noted how well named Tubby seemed to be; for one could hardly look at him without being forcibly reminded of a butter firkin, or else of the most useful family utensil on wash days.

"Why, I understand that for a time, until they learned who you were," the general went on to remark, with a quizzical look, "there was considerable indignation going around that our great Government should send out boys to help patrol the Rio Grande, and to keep the fighting Mexi-

cans on their own side of the river. But you say you wish to consult me about something; so, as my time may be limited, suppose you start in and give me the facts. I want to assure you in the start, though, that I've watched the growth of the scout movement from a small beginning; and that I'm heart and soul in favor of it as the finest thing that ever happened for uplifting the American youth. It's going to make a great difference in the kind of *men* we'll be having ten and twenty years from now."

After hearing that, of course, Rob knew they would have the full sympathy of the general in the carrying out of their mission. However, he might fear that they were undertaking too great a task in risking the dangers of travel through so disturbed a country as Mexico at that time, since both Federals and rebels were feeling anything but friendly toward Americans.

So Rob started in to narrate the entire story, and he made such a fine thing of it that the interested listener only interrupted him a few times to ask further particulars concerning certain points.

All the while his eyes kindled with growing admiration for these brave lads, who were ready

to take such great risks in order to save Uncle Mark's cattle, if it so happened that they had not been already seized by one side or the other of the contending forces.

"I suppose it would do no good for me to try and discourage you, boys," he said heartily, after the whole story had been told; "because I can easily see that you would try to carry out your plans at any rate. And that being the case, I might as well give you what advice I can, and help you in that way."

His words caused every boyish face to be wreathed in smiles.

"That is very kind of you, General," said Rob; "and we will try to act on the advice you give us, you may be sure. All we want is to meet General Pancho Villa; and from what Uncle Mark told us about his being a man of his word, we think the rest will be easy."

The experienced officer smiled grimly. Possibly he had opinions of his own about whether one who had been a lawless bandit for years would remember a kind deed to the point of throwing protection about the ranch of his former friend; but he did not venture to disturb the belief of the sanguine scouts.

"First of all you must have horses. I'll put you in touch with a man who can supply those, for I understood you to say you had plenty of money to pay for an outfit. Then you must take enough supplies along to do you for a week; because you may be that long getting to the town of Chihuahua, where we have reason to believe Villa is at present. He has forced many rich Mexicans and trades people there to pay tribute; and hundreds have made a pilgrimage across the desert with the two thousand Federal soldiers who were forced to leave Chihuahua when the Constitutionalists, as Villa's men call themselves, captured the place. And last of all, I know the very man you will need to serve you as a guide. He is a Mexican, but I have always found him entirely trustworthy; and he will be glad to favor me. So I will give you a few lines to Mardo Lopez, and tell you at what inn you can find him."

It was certainly cheering to hear the general say such kind things; and later on, when he shook hands all around again and told them to come and see him if he could do them any further favor, the four boys felt that they had indeed great reason to rejoice, because "all things

seemed to be coming their way," as Andy put it.

They soon found the man called Mardo Lopez. While he did not impress them very favorably, because he seemed to have what they thought to be a dark, crafty face, he readily agreed to do everything in his power to oblige the general, and to prove that he could be trusted.

After that they took the guide with them to pick out the horses, knowing that his judgment would be better than their own; for Mardo was accustomed to traveling across the desert lands that stretched in many places between the river and the capital of Chihuahua, some two hundred miles and more from the border, and almost due south.

By the middle of the afternoon they had bought everything needed, and had their mounts, together with equipments for the same, safely housed at the tavern where they put up. Then, at Andy's suggestion, the Mexican took them for a little stroll, meaning to ask many questions concerning the organization to which they belonged; for Mardo had, it seemed, heard about the scouts, but up to that time had never been told what they stood for.

Rob, it may be set down as certain, was only

too glad to pass the word along; for he himself believed so thoroughly in the uplifting power of the Boy Scout movement, that he wanted everybody to understand it in the same light.

The four boys and their new guide were walking along close to the bank of the river, the latter telling them many things that they would have to run up against once they found themselves on Mexican soil, when far away across the river there came the dull report of a gun; and then, just over their heads something cut through the air, making a whining sound that gave them all a thrill.

That was the first time they had really been under fire; but even Tubby seemed to know instinctively what the queer whistle meant, and that a bullet had passed within a few yards of their heads.

CHAPTER XIII.

CROSSING THE FORD.

"Whee! hunt cover, fellers! Somebody's making a target of us!" exclaimed Tubby, looking wildly around for a convenient tree or adobe hut behind which he might hide his ample form.

But the Mexican guide showed them how they could quickly find shelter back of the bank; and, possibly, all of the boys breathed easier when assured that they were no longer exposed to the fire of the unseen marksman far back on the other side of the narrow river.

"But what does it mean?" asked Rob. "I thought the rebels were in force across the bridge, and that they did all in their power to make Uncle Sam look on their side with favor."

"It is so, young señor," the guide replied; "but often have the bullets come across here when the Federals and the rebels, they have fight it out over there. But now it is that some man thinks if Americans are shot it must come that the soldiers in El Paso will have to cross the in-

ternational bridge, and that would mean what they call intervention."

"Oh! I see what you mean," Rob told him. "Then that was only some crazy man with a gun who wanted to bother Uncle Sam and make him real mad so he would send his soldiers across to punish him. And once they stepped on Mexican soil it would mean we'd have a war on our hands."

After that they were careful not to expose themselves more than seemed necessary as they continued their walk; and coming back they kept further away from the river so as to avoid a repetition of the bombardment. There was not much chance of the wretched marksman hitting them; but then, even bullets fired at random have been known to find a lodging place, as Rob had been told.

One of the first things the guide had assured them was that it would never do for the scouts to think of trying to enter Mexico by openly crossing the bridge. It was closely guarded on the one side by Uncle Sam's soldiers, and across the line by squads of rebels. The latter examined every one wishing to come or go, in many cases forcibly preventing the exit of some promising

subject who might be made to yield tribute to the cause of the revolutionists, as well as refusing to allow others to enter Mexico, whom they believed might have some object contrary to the interests of their side.

But then the guide had informed them that he knew a ford where they might with perfect safety cross the river, now at a low stage. Once on the opposite shore they must depend on the fleet heels of their horses to take them inland, and in this manner avoid a meeting with any hostile force.

It was all arranged that they start early on the following morning. Mardo was ready to do whatever they asked; and Tubby expressed himself as decidedly anxious to meet General Villa with as little delay as possible. He felt just as Uncle Mark had declared it might be, that the rebel commander in Chihuahua would by now believe he had done all that could be expected of him in serving the man who years before had saved his life, and who had been also a friend of the lamented President Madero. And as Villa's army needed rations and money desperately, possibly he would be planning either to kill off the fine steers on the Matthews Ranch, or else

sell them to some enterprising American speculator for shipment across the line.

Perhaps none of the boys expected to sleep any too soundly that night, thinking of what a novel experience was before them; though all of them were tired after their long train ride.

Not a great while after supper, however, a soldier came to the inn and asked for Rob. He bore a message from the commandant to the effect that he would be pleased to have another little chat with the young assistant scout master to hear how his plans were coming on.

This decided interest which the general seemed to take in their enterprise gave Rob considerable pleasure. He eagerly availed himself of the privilege of meeting the soldier once more, and only regretted that his three chums had not been included in the invitation.

And Rob spent a very satisfactory half hour with the general, to whom he confided all his plans. He told so much about the previous experiences of the Eagle scouts, also, that the interested soldier felt reluctant to terminate the interview.

"I could go on chatting with you for hours, my son," he said, shaking hands as he dismissed the

boy, "because I am so deeply interested in your ambitions and in what you have already gone through, you and your fine comrades. But I have appointed a meeting with some of my officers to plan for the new emergencies that are continually arising. Believe me, you have my best wishes, and if I do not see you again on your return—for something tells me you *will* return, and after successfully carrying out your mission, too,—let me hear from you. It will give me great pleasure to reply."

This sort of talk was encouraging, to say the least. It gave Rob renewed ambition to push on along the course he had mapped out.

Of course, when he arrived at the inn he found the other boys still sitting up waiting for him; so that by degrees everything that the general had said had to be repeated before they consented to go to bed.

With the coming of morning they were all up. Tubby kept declaring that he did not have a wink of sleep all night on account of the hard bed and the various strange noises that came from without. But Andy returned that every time *he* waked up, and it must have been in the neighborhood of a dozen separate occasions, he

had particularly noticed that Tubby was sprawled over two-thirds of their bed, and snoring "to beat the band." After that Tubby closed up, possibly under the impression that the others would call him a fake.

As soon as they had had breakfast they found the guide waiting, mounted on his own horse; and then the bustle of preparation began. Tubby had to be helped more than a few times, for he became so excited that he could not remember where he had left a number of important things. Andy finally declared that it was lucky that the fat scout's head was firmly attached to his body, for otherwise he would be losing that also!

"Well," answered Tubby, grinning, "even if that did happen, I wouldn't be the first feller who'd gone and lost his head, would I? I'd like to have ten dollars for every time you have, Andy Bowles."

Finally everything was in readiness, and they started; but there were no cheers wafted after them on this occasion. The boys, acting under the advice of the general, had been very careful not to tell a single person other than Mardo Lopez what they intended doing. The rebels had

many secret sympathizers on that shore of the Rio Grande; and perhaps one of these might think it worth while to transmit the news across that a little party of gringo boy soldiers contemplated invading the sacred soil of Mexico.

Leaving the lively town of El Paso behind, the little party struck along the river, and continued to gallop for several hours, until they came to the place where the ford mentioned by Lopez lay.

The cautious native guide was very careful to keep a bright lookout, not wishing to have his charges fired on from either bank of the stream while crossing.

"Better you wait here, young señors," he observed, as they pulled up in the shelter of some scrub trees that grew on a rise; "as for me, I will go over and take a look around on the other side. When you hear me call, and I wave my hand, it is a sign that you cross safely."

"All right, Lopez, we're on to what you mean," Andy told him.

They watched him crossing the stream, taking note of what he did, so as to keep the current from pushing his mount from the shelf that made the water so shallow.

"We must copy exactly that way of doing," Rob directed the rest. "I never crossed a river at a ford in my life; and certainly not on horseback. But it seems easy enough once you've got the hang of things."

"Huh! won't be any trouble at all," Tubby assured him, being confident of his ability to keep his horse headed right; and Andy also declared that it looked "just as easy as falling off a log."

Lopez, after pulling out on the other side, rode some distance up and down, as well as back from the river, in order to make sure that there might not be a party of natives, whether Federals, rebels, or bandits, lying in ambush. Should such a party open fire upon the boys while they were in the middle of the stream, they would be next to helpless to return the shots.

"There, he's waving his hat, now, and beckoning to us to come on!" exclaimed Merritt, as the guide came galloping down close to the edge of the river. "That means the coast is clear, and we can cross over in peace. Rob, after you!"

Rob started in, and so well had he taken note of his landmarks, that he was able to follow exactly after the guide. At the same time he kept his horse's head turned partly up-stream, so that

it could resist the sweep of the swift current. Had the flank of the animal caught the full force of the rushing water the crossing would have been more difficult.

Merritt came after Rob, then Andy, and last, but far from least, Tubby. No sooner did the latter find himself in water deep enough to wet his half-drawn-up feet than he realized that to a novice this crossing a ford was not such a simple thing after all. He tried his best to follow Andy, and in so doing exposed the side of his horse to the swing of the current more than policy would seem to dictate.

In consequence of this indiscretion, presently Tubby began to find that he could no longer keep exactly in the wake of the scout just ahead of him. Then he discovered that he was constantly losing ground, so to speak, and being carried further and further down the river, a foot at a time.

He could hear Lopez shouting something, but as the Mexican had unconsciously lapsed into Spanish, of course poor Tubby failed to understand a single word of the instructions he was calling.

"Hey, I'll have to swim for 't, fellers!" the fat

"Hey, I'll have to swim for it, fellows!" the fat boy shouted.
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boy shouted; though just what good it would do to inform his comrades of his predicament he could not have told had he been asked.

Rob turned in the saddle and saw that unless a miracle came to pass, Tubby was bound to get a wetting. He started to call out something, and then stopped short, for it was useless to try and tell the luckless scout what to do. Already his horse had reached the end of the ford and was in deep water, swimming lustily for the shore, while the alarmed Tubby threw both arms around the animal's neck, and held on for dear life.

Whether there was any real danger in the situation or not the other boys could not, of course, say; but Tubby's way of clasping his short arms about his horse's neck so as to prevent himself from being washed overboard was so comical that they had to laugh, even while urging their own mounts to the farther shore, so as to be on hand to render assistance if such should be needed.

To Tubby it was all serious enough; and no doubt just then he imagined that he stood a fair chance of being separated from his possessions and carried down the Rio Grande, perhaps to an untimely death.

CHAPTER XIV.

A GALLOP ON MEXICAN SOIL.

"Hey, Rob, tell me what to do!" Tubby could be heard shouting at the top of his voice, as he kept on hugging his horse about the neck, being evidently determined not to allow the current to pluck him out of his saddle, at any rate so long as he could maintain that rigid grip.

Even in that sudden emergency Tubby found himself depending on Rob as usual; and to hear him asking for information, one would believe that the young patrol leader knew more about river fords than a dozen native guides who had been used to crossing by this means all their lives.

Rob had reached shallow water, and immediately urged his horse down-stream, in order to come opposite the drifting scout.

"Just keep holding on, and the horse will bring you to land!" he called out encouragingly. "He is making a plucky fight, and getting in closer all the while. As soon as he strikes bottom it will be all over; so keep your grip, Tubby."

This the fat scout did; and just as Rob had said, presently the swimming animal reached a more shallow point, where he could get his footing and manage to swing in closer than ever. And in another five minutes Tubby emerged from the river, "looking like a half-drowned rat," as Andy assured him, for streams were dripping from each foot, and he was soaked from his waist down.

"Anyway, I had horse sense enough to keep my gun dry," Tubby observed. "But what shall I do now, Rob? I'm weighing half a ton, I guess."

"You're not apt to catch cold in this warm air," Rob told him; "and so you might as well let your duds dry on you. At noon, when we halt for a bite, you can open up your bundle and spread your blanket out for the sun to dry. After all, there wasn't any damage done."

"Only to my feelings," Tubby reminded him.

"And they don't count," said Andy, laughing at the recollection of the tragic way in which Tubby had embraced that horse. He had held to it about as a leech might have clung when applied to the arm of a patient in the old days when they bled sick men.

They at once turned their backs on the Rio

Grande, and according to what Lopez told them, they were not likely to set eyes on the river again until their mission had either been successfully carried out, or proven a failure.

Rob took a fond look at the stream. Somehow it seemed to be the very last link binding them to their home land; for across the running water lay the good old United States. And they were now on foreign soil, where the Starry Flag at present was powerless to protect them from a multitude of perils.

Presently they could see the river no longer, because they were rising over a level stretch of country through which the flood at some time in the far past had cut a deep channel.

From now on, what was around and before them was to serve fully to occupy their attention.

When half a dozen miles had been passed over, Rob began to notice that Tubby was not looking as happy as he might; and he feared that the pace was telling more or less on the stout chum.

"Are we going too fast for you, Tubby?" he called out; and instantly the other tried to look utterly unconcerned, as though he were enjoying himself to the utmost.

"What, for me?" he immediately answered, with a ring of indignation in his voice; though every jump of his horse caused him to shake like a mould of jelly. "Well, I should say not! You couldn't move too fast to suit my mind, Rob. If I had an aeroplane right now you'd see me sailing away at the rate of a hundred miles an hour, and headed for that same old town of Chihuahua. Why didn't we think to bring something like that along? Aeroplanes may be dangerous things, but then they're a heap more comfortable than some nags I know!"

No matter how Tubby suffered, he seemed bound not to admit the fact; and knowing his stubborn nature, Rob did not try to show any further sympathy for him. If things really became too bad, perhaps Tubby would consent to ask them to hold up and let him have a breathing spell. But at any rate, they were surely putting the miles behind them, and before nighttime would have made "quite a dent in that journey to the capital of the State," as Andy said.

Before the middle of the day came, Rob had the guide call a halt, for he knew it was punishment to Tubby to keep this up as they were doing. The sun was so scorchingly hot that the

fat boy seemed very nearly as wet with perspiration as he had been soaked with river water a little earlier. But even then he complained at the stop, and told Rob he should have been able to hold out another half-hour or until noon. This caused the other scouts to exchange winks, and behind their hands tell each other that for dogged perseverance Tubby surely had them all "beaten a mile."

While they rested their mounts and had a cold bite, Tubby was induced to open his pack and spread out such things as seemed damp, so that when night came he would not have to lie down under a blanket that gave him a chill. Lopez warned the boys that while the day had been very hot, they would find good reason to wish they had two blankets apiece before morning.

"We found that out the time we were down at Panama," said Rob; "though, perhaps, being further north now may make a difference. But Tubby's just got to have his blanket good and dry, and that goes."

Tubby managed to accomplish this; and as they packed up later on to continue their gallop, he told the others that the sun had done the business all right.

Several times during the morning's run the keen-sighted guide had discovered moving figures far off. Rob had been thoughtful enough to bring a small but powerful pair of field-glasses, along with many other things; and these now came in handy to tell them whether the distant parties were seemingly Federal soldiers or members of Villa's rebel army foraging for supplies.

"But if Villa's men are holding all the ground between Chihuahua, from which they chased Salazar's forces a little while ago, and Juarez on the river, why do we need to fear running across any Federal soldiers?" Andy wanted to know, when once Lopez, after taking a look through the glasses, declared that he believed the half dozen riders they watched going further away might be men in the uniform of Mexican regulars.

"Generally speaking, they do hold this territory, which mostly used to belong to the wealthy Terrazas family," Rob explained; "but reports have come in that several bodies of mounted regulars were dispatched from Ojinaga, where half a dozen generals and their men are fortifying their positions to make a stubborn stand against the rebels. These raiders have orders to cut the

telegraph lines, and destroy all the bridges they can between Chihuahua and the border on both lines of railroad. And so you see, we are apt to run across one of these flying columns at any old time. That is what the good general warned me to look out for; because, of course, we have more to fear from Salazar's men than from the rebels."

"Ginger snaps and pop-guns! I should say we had," exclaimed Tubby, "when we remember what precious document—er, I mean how much we want to see General Villa!"

Rob had not thought it wise to tell everything to the guide until they came to know him better; and hence his frown and vigorous shake of the head toward the talkative Tubby, when the other came within an ace of "letting the cat out of the bag."

They did not ride quite so fast during the afternoon, all on Tubby's account, though no one dared let him know that, or he would have been very angry. As the day began to wane, and they seemed to be in a part of the wild country free from either rebels or Government troops, Rob suggested that they come to a halt and go into camp.

"We must have made as much as forty miles and more since morning, and so be that much nearer Chihuahua," he remarked; "and that's good enough for one day. Perhaps to-morrow we may work closer to the railroad, and try to get in touch with some of Villa's men, who will take us to him. There's Lopez dismounting, boys, so let's do the same."

Merritt and Andy both grunted as they managed with some difficulty to get out of their saddles, after Rob had set the example. As for Tubby, he seemed to be glued in his seat, for while they saw him make a desperate effort several times, he did not seem able to accomplish a separation. Finally, with a foolish grin on his face, he beckoned to Rob to come nearer.

"I'm afraid you'll have to give me a lift, Rob," he confessed; "fact is, I don't seem able to raise either leg, I'm that stiff. That's a good feller, just get me started and I'll be all right, sure I will. And after I've jumped around a few dozen times I'll be ready to dance a hoedown if you ask me."

But it was noticed that Tubby was unusually quiet all that evening, hardly bothering to move more than to reach out for his share of supper;

nor did he volunteer to do his part in the cooking. "For what is the use," he complained, "when we have an experienced guide along who loves to cook?" And at one time, when Rob leisurely got to his feet and reached for a tin cup, Tubby even had the assurance to call out softly after him:

"If so be you're meaning to go to the creek for a drink, Rob, wish you'd fetch a cup of water for me, and thank you!"

The truth of the matter was that ride had been a terrible experience to the fat scout, and he had suffered much more than anybody suspected. But by slow degrees he would grow accustomed to the exercise, and perhaps even enjoy life in the saddle before they were done scouring the country in search of Villa.

Lopez had taken every sort of precaution to avoid having their camp seen by any hostile eyes. In the first place, he had selected for a site a spot that was fairly well screened by dense thickets; it was also in a sort of little depression or basin, where the glow of the small fire they had lighted to prepare their meal might not be discovered.

This blaze had been allowed to die out after

it had served the purpose for which Lopez had started it; so that as they sat there, talking in low voices, only the soft starlight looked down upon them.

Tubby was later on discovered to be sound asleep; and as Andy and Merritt admitted feeling pretty drowsy themselves, Rob told them they had better get their blankets ready to do duty. He himself fixed that of Tubby, and managed to draw the sleeping scout under it without awakening him.

All seemed deathly quiet when Rob lay down to secure some rest. The guide had assured him that there was no need of their keeping watch, because his horse had been trained by a cowboy to give the alarm if any enemy came prowling around.

Confident that all would be well, the patrol leader settled himself as comfortably as was possible, under the conditions, and after some little time spent in running over in his mind various matters that had a connection with their mission to Mexico, he fell asleep.

Rob did not know whether it was half an hour that he had been lost in slumber, or five times that long, when he was rudely disturbed by some one

kicking his shins. And at the same time he became conscious of a low whispering voice saying:

"Rob, oh! Rob, are you awake? What under the sun is making that queer noise?"

It was Andy calling; and becoming conscious that there were some strange noises rising on the night air close by at the same time, Rob raised his head the better to listen.

Andy's question must have been overheard by Merritt, for he at once let them know he was awake and on the alert; but as for Tubby, he only wheezed, and breathed harder than ever; for he was a thousand miles away in his dreams.

CHAPTER XV.

ANDY SCATTERS THE SERENADERS.

The first thing that Rob noticed was that it did not seem nearly as dark and gloomy as when he had lain down. Could it be he had slept the whole night through, and that daylight was at hand? He settled this mystery with his first glance upward; for there he discovered that a pale fragment of a once proud moon had arisen in the east, and was looking mournfully down upon their hidden camp.

Next he made out the form of Lopez, the Mexican guide, who was sitting with his back against a tree, as though that might be his favorite way of sleeping. But he was very much awake now, for he moved even as Rob took notice of his presence.

The queer chorus of sounds continued to arise from various points near by. Rob made up his mind that they must be actually surrounded by some species of animal that certainly sang away off the proper key, for they made a noise that jarred on his ear terribly.

"Hear 'em, don't you, Rob?" continued Andy, who doubtless must have been observing the movements of the acting scout master all this while by the aid of that friendly moonlight.

"Do I? Well, I'd have to be pretty deaf not to, Andy," Rob replied.

"What do you reckon it can be? I never in all my life heard such an awful lot of discord," continued the other scout apprehensively.

"I'm only giving a wide guess," Rob told him; "but I should think only a pack of wolves could make a racket like that; or perhaps now, coyotes."

"How about that, Lopez?" Merritt struck in; and the guide, chuckling, replied:

"Last is what it is, young señors; kiote make much noise when hungry. It is our food they scent. Kiote happen to have a very keen nose. No trouble, no danger as long as they hang around. Too much coward to sneak in; and long as we hear kiote sing, we know no spy can be near, or they run away."

"Sing!" burst out Andy with a snort; "is that what they call it down here? Mebbe some folks like that sort of song, but let me tell you it grates on my ears like the screeching of a pack of

cats at night. Sing! Whoo-ee! are you joshing us poor tenderfeet, Lopez?"

"Oh! there's nothing like getting used to things, Andy," Rob assured him, while at the same time he was in doubt whether he himself could go to sleep again if all that noise kept up right along. "After a while, when you've heard that chant nightly, you may think it's the finest lullaby ever invented, and miss it the worst kind after you hike away north."

"Don't you believe it, Rob," returned the other positively. "I wouldn't mind being soothed to sleep by sweet sounds, like the thrumming of a guitar or a mandolin; but excuse me from that caterwauling. Listen to it rise and fall! That is just the way our old Tom used to sit on the back fence and talk to the moon till I rigged up a wire along there and connected it with our electric circuit. After that, when I woke and heard him tuning up, all I had to do was to press the button, and everything was still again. But he did always give one awful screech as he lit out!"

"Well, suppose you rig up a switch and circuit here, so you can give these singing coyotes some of the same medicine?" laughed Merritt.

"You know I can't do that," Andy admitted

mournfully; "wish I could right now; and let me tell you there'd be a heap of scatterin' out there when the circuit was closed. But what's the matter with me sneaking out and giving them a shot or two from my rifle? We didn't lug our guns all this way just for ornament, did we? And surely they couldn't be used in a nobler cause than to get us poor tired fellows decent sleep."

"How about that, Lopez?" asked Rob. "Do you think there would be any danger of the shots betraying our camp to others who might happen to be around?"

"The danger it is not much," came the reply; "and as for that, the singing of the kiote pack, it tell that a camp must be here; so there is no differenee."

"That settles it, then," said Andy exultantly, as he began to unwrap himself from his blanket and grope for his rifle; "and mebbe I won't surprise a few of the noisy gents out there!"

"Don't go too far," Rob warned him, as he started to crawl away on his hands and knees, trailing his gun after him.

"I won't," Andy whispered back, turning his

head and then giving a little flirt with one hand in his customary jolly way.

"No use trying to go to sleep till the circus ends, is there?" Merritt demanded, as he shuffled around, trying to get into an easier position.

"Just what I'd made up my mind to myself," replied Rob, following suit.

"Look at Tubby here, sleeping as sweetly as an overgrown baby," the corporal of the Eagle Patrol went on to say with a low laugh.

"Oh! Tubby is the best sleeper I ever knew," Rob assured him. "He often talks as if he had been wakeful all the night, but it's a false alarm. He can sleep through a pretty good thunderstorm, and then remark in the morning that he thinks it must have rained a little during the night. But wait and see if he hears the noise when Andy lets fly with his repeating rifle!"

"Cracky! that's a fact. Chances are he'll just sit up and say the mosquitoes are beginning to get bothersome, for he just heard one singing near his ear; and then he'll call out to ask you for the dope to rub on," Merritt remarked, humorously.

"Wait and see," said Rob; "and it can't be long coming now, because I should think Andy must

have crawled far enough to glimpse the circle of mourners."

Hardly had Rob spoken than there came a loud report, instantly followed by a series of yelps, that were drowned in snarls and howls as the other coyotes took after their wounded comrade.

Both boys had their eyes focused on the mound that stood for the sleeping Tubby. There was a sudden upheaval, and the blanket flew aside, revealing the fat scout trying to scramble to his knees with every symptom of alarm.

"Oh! what was that terrible noise?" he stammered. "Rob! Oh, Rob, are we attacked by Injuns? Or was that thunder? Where am I at? Who's got a torch lighted up there? Whatever does it all mean, anyway?"

"Keep cool, Tubby," said Rob, while Merritt laughed at a great rate, although rather softly; "it's all right, no danger. The camp was surrounded by a pack of coyotes, that's all; and their singing kept Andy awake, so he asked permission to crawl out and knock a few of them over. You heard him shoot, and he must have wounded a prowler, for the whole pack took after it at a hot pace. That's all!"

"Oh, is it, Rob? Then, what's the sense of sit-

ting up in the cold and wasting time, when you might be getting forty winks?" With which remark the fat boy cuddled down again under his blanket, and settled himself to resume his interrupted slumbers.

Rob and Merritt laughed again and again over his matter-of-fact way; but beyond a grunt or two, Tubby paid no attention to them. Presently Andy came back, a satisfied grin resting on his good-natured face.

"Told you I'd pickle one silly old coyote, anyway," he remarked, as he prepared to settle down again in his nest.

"We heard him call out, and then the whole pack seemed to chase away after him. Was that the way, Andy?" Merritt asked.

"They all went spinning off in the direction of the desert there; and the one I hit must have been ahead of the pack, because I could hear him tooting up at a great rate. Sho! there must have been all of a dozen in the lot! Bet you they don't come around here in a hurry again after that lesson!"

But Andy was mistaken. In less than half an hour the howls started in once more, at first from some distance, but gradually drawing

closer, until apparently the coyote concert band was again at the old stand, appealing to Andy to try it once more, and provide them with some further pickings.

Andy, however, refused to be tempted, for Rob, who was also awake, told him he would have to sit up the balance of the night, since the animals were bound to return time and again; nor would he be able to induce them to stop their wailing, since, driven from the vicinity of the camp, they would stand afar off and start a new chant.

All of the boys were glad when the first peep of dawn drove the coyotes to their dens among the rocks in the hills, or some barranca near by.

Just as Rob had said, they would undoubtedly become more or less accustomed to such nightly serenades in time, and pay little heed to the howling. To one used to sleeping in the open, where wolves and coyotes abound, the chorus comes to be a species of protection; and if it suddenly ceased in the middle of the night he would immediately rouse himself to investigate what had driven the pack away, for it must either be a human enemy, or a jaguar.

The boys expected, after partaking of hot cof-

fee and a light breakfast, to resume their gallop toward the south. Andy busied himself in laying the fire, which they had allowed the guide to do on the previous evening, although any one of the boys knew as much about arranging this as Lopez. He had had actual experience all his adventurous life; but, then, they had practiced the art of building cooking fires as one of the duties with which a scout should be familiar, and they knew just how to get the best results.

Besides, the boys had learned something from the way Lopez selected their camp site. They could guess why it was screened by thickets on nearly all sides; and also why it lay in a slight depression, so that the glow of the little blaze might not draw inquisitive strangers, as an exposed light would.

They had learned long ago to keep their eyes open so as to see everything that went on around them. Rob in particular was always on the alert, and if he thought any of the others failed to grasp what a certain thing meant, it was his habit to call their attention to the circumstances. For that is what a patrol leader is expected to do when he has been elevated to his important position.

Andy had just managed to get the cooking fire ready, and was asking Tubby to bring him the frying-pan, because they expected to have a rasher of bacon for breakfast, to go with the hardtack and coffee. At that moment the horse of the guide, staked near by, began to snort and prance, as well as give other indications of excitement. Lopez had been in the act of rolling up his blanket into a small bundle that could easily be carried behind his saddle. He seemed to know instinctively what these riotous actions on the part of his mount stood for; because, with an exclamation of alarm, he jumped for his gun that rested against a tree trunk.

Rob did the same, ditto Merritt; while Andy continued to kneel there in front of his little fire as though frozen stiff. As for Tubby, he dropped the frying-pan in a panic and snatched up the camp hatchet.

Rob had already caught the sound of horses' hoofs near by; and even as he turned his eyes in the quarter from which the sounds seemed to spring, there came around the end of the thicket a couple of horsemen, who, on discovering the camp with its surprised inmates, drew their

mounts in abruptly and sat there in their saddles staring hard.

Rob could see that the men were garbed in a sort of dirty white uniform; and from this he quickly judged that they must be a couple of Salazar's cavalrymen, sent out to burn bridges and demoralize the railroad completely between Chihuahua and Juarez. As Federals were bound to look upon all Americans as their bitter enemies, on account of the attitude taken by the Washington authorities concerning President Huerta, the patrol leader guessed that they were in for another experience.

CHAPTER XVI.

IN THE ENEMY'S COUNTRY.

"Don't shoot!" Rob called out hastily, fearing that Lopez might think it his duty, as the guardian of the little party, to open fire on the Regulars; and this was not in accordance with the designs of the Boy Scouts, who were bound to exhaust every peaceful effort before proceeding to any violence.

Andy had by this time come to his senses, and started to crawl over to where he had stacked his rifle. Shooting at coyotes was one thing, however, and being compelled to fire upon human beings quite another; and the boy looked pretty white "about the gills," as Merritt afterward put it, as he clutched his weapon. But he had also heard what the patrol leader said, and did not make any hostile demonstration, beyond pulling back the hammer of his gun with his trembling thumb.

Of course, if the two Mexican soldiers made any attempt to run off their mounts, Rob knew

very well that they could not stand for that; since to be forced to foot it all the way to Chihuahua, across burning desert sands, and rough hilly country, was a prospect that did not appeal to him at all.

Fortunately the pair of cavalrymen did not dream of attacking nearly three times their number. They just took it out in staring, and possibly saying things back and forth. Then, as though they had decided that retreat was the best play, since they were plainly outnumbered, suddenly both men wheeled their horses and went galloping swiftly away, sitting their saddles with that grace that seems to be a natural heritage of all Mexicans.

"Good riddance of bad rubbage!" called out Merritt; though the boy was undoubtedly relieved to see the cavalrymen depart without a fight.

Whether the men heard what he said or not, they turned and shook their fists in the direction of the scouts; and from the threatening gestures that followed this action it was plainly to be seen that they did not mean this to be the last time they expected to meet the little party.

Rob turned to Lopez when the pair had van-

ished from view, and he could no longer catch the heavy thud of their horses' hoofs on the hard ground.

He found the guide frowning, and this fact told Rob what to expect.

"That spells trouble for us, doesn't it, Lopez?" he asked; while Tubby, Merritt and Andy hung upon what was passing between guide and patrol leader.

The Mexican shrugged his shoulders.

"If they can make it so, we will be followed, young señor," he remarked. "You saw for yourself they were Federal cavalrymen, the same that General Salazar he have send out to cut the railroad between Chihuahua and the river. All men who fight for Huerta hate Yankee gringoes; and they see these uniforms, so they understand you are Americano soldiers. That is bad!"

"So that's the way the land lies!" remarked Merritt. "Well, we do not intend taking off these good old suits and wearing anything else, not if we know it. But see here, Lopez, what if those fellows should take a notion to sneak around on us, and try a shot from the rear?"

"Not much chance of that, with all these thickets around, which Lopez calls the chaparral,"

Rob told him; "but I'll just wander off a bit, and see if I can glimpse them going. If that fails, I'll keep watch while the rest of you eat breakfast. Get busy, Andy and Tubby, so we'll have that agony over in a hurry."

"Agony!" repeated Tubby indignantly. "Well, I like that, now, don't you, Andy? As if eating could ever be a task!"

Passing out of the hidden camp, Rob found a place where he could get an uninterrupted view of the lower country. And it was not long before he discovered two mounted men, whom he easily recognized as their unbidden visitors, spurring away as fast as their horses could take them. When the scout saw them look back several times, he no longer doubted that they were positively the men he had come to watch.

It made Rob a trifle uneasy to note the fact that the cavalrymen had departed in almost a southerly direction; because that might indicate future trouble for the little expedition.

When he showed up in camp again breakfast was just ready.

"Hello! changed your mind about not wanting to eat, have you, Rob?" hailed Tubby.

"Oh! you mistook what I said," replied the

other laughingly, as he threw himself down, selected a pannikin, and proceeded to slide several slices of fried bacon out of the skillet. Then as he accepted the tin cup of fragrant coffee which Merritt hastened to pour for him, he added, "Guess I like to eat when I'm hungry as well as anybody."

"But you draw the line there, don't you, Rob?" demanded Andy. "You don't want to eat any old time, whether you're hungry or not, like some fellows we know?"

"Yes, we know a few, Andy," Tubby hastened to thrust in, realizing that this was meant for his especial benefit; "and I notice that you're copying after me in great shape, so that soon I'll have to take a back seat."

"But what about those two cavalrymen, Rob?" asked Merritt, more deeply interested in seeking information along these lines than in learning which of the two disputing scouts could boast of the greater appetite.

"They've kicked the dust of this part of the country from their boots, and are riding pellmell away to the south," Rob answered. "I reckon there must be a big bunch of hard riders over there somewhere. All I hope is that we don't

run foul of them during the day and find ourselves pursued."

Tubby, at that, forgot all about his controversy with Andy.

"What, us chased by a lot of greaser cavalry?" he exclaimed. "Jiminy crickets! I hope that don't happen! I am not in the best shape going to do any tall riding; though if I'm hard pushed, you'll find me sticking to my horse like a mustard plaster. Mebbe you'll have to take a crowbar next time, Rob, to pry me loose from my saddle."

"Well, let's get through eating as soon as we can," Rob told him; "because this isn't any time to take things easy."

"Huh! always rushing me when I just get settled down to enjoy a little bite of grub which I've helped cook," grumbled Tubby. But seeing that the others were making haste, he set his jaws to working at double pace; and when no one was looking he even managed to slip some of the hard tack into his pocket. If they did force him to shorten his breakfast hour to ten minutes, he wanted something to set his teeth into during the long hours that must elapse be-

fore they found another chance to break their fast.

The horses were soon saddled and packed, so that the camp in the thicket could be abandoned. Of course, as usual, they had to wait for Tubby, because something was always wrong with his bridle, or else the girth needed shortening so that his saddle would not turn with him as it had threatened to do many times the day before.

Finally the start was made.

The morning was fresh and clear; and while the day might turn out to be hot enough toward noon to "fry an egg on a stone in the sun," as Andy expressed it, the boys certainly enjoyed that first hour's gallop. Tubby, who soon found his former troubles coming back, did not have unalloyed pleasure, although he did not complain.

It was a fine stretch of country, and yet Rob knew that they were really not far from the dreary desert. At times, when they had a chance to look off to one side, they could see a vast level territory with not a single tree to break its monotony, nothing but the dry sand that each wind would send scurrying along to form new hillocks and valleys.

But they had also discovered something else

that pleased them more. This was an occasional glimpse of the railroad that ran between Chihuahua and Juarez, being long known as the Mexican Central. In other days, before revolutions came again to vex Uncle Sam's southern neighbor, it had run without interruption all the way from the Rio Grande to Mexico City, many hundreds of miles.

For some time past this road had been first in the hands of the rebels, and then in the possession of the Federals. As each in turn tried to destroy as much of the track and rolling stock as possible before vacating, it can be understood that conditions were pretty bad all along the road at this time.

It was the intention of Rob later on in the day to seek this line of rusty rails and keep following it south. He anticipated meeting with a party of Villa's men, perhaps before dark set in. Making friends with them, he would demand to be taken into the presence of the commanding general, whether he happened to be in far-off Chihuahua, or at some point nearer by. He might even be chasing the marauding bands of Federals that were playing fast and loose with the railroad, on which he depended to move his men

and munitions of war from Juarez south, on the way to Mexico City.

They kept on riding constantly for several hours. Even Merritt and Andy felt the strain, which must have been unusually severe on poor Tubby; but no one heard the gamey fat scout give even a groan. Often, when Rob would turn his head to look over his shoulder, he could not help but see the look of "never-say-die" that was imprinted on Tubby's glowing face, and notice how he kept mopping his streaming forehead.

But they were covering considerable distance, and that was a great comfort. Tubby had much more at stake than any one of his three chums, and he must, as the boys always said, "grin and bear it." In fact, there was nothing else that could be done, since going back now was out of the question; nor would Tubby have allowed any one to mention such a thing to him.

Once when Rob dropped back to ask him how he felt, Tubby knew that the leader was really solicitous about his welfare and had not made the inquiry merely in fun.

"I can stand it, Rob!" was all he said between his closely shut teeth; and knowing Tubby as well as he did, Rob felt sure that the fat boy

would hold out, unless he actually fell from his saddle.

At noon they halted in order to rest the horses, and at the same time themselves have a bite. Again did Rob have to assist Tubby to alight, though the other began to frisk around shortly, as though grimly determined on showing them all that he had only been stiff from sitting so long, and was far from being done up.

It took a whole lot of grit for Tubby to mount when the time came to make a fresh start; but he seemed to feel that curious eyes were watching all he did; so summoning his reserve strength, he clambered into his saddle, and tried to look as happy as though he did not feel that he was sitting on an inverted pincushion.

Just one hour later they noticed a dense smoke rising ahead, which Lopez, on being asked, told them could only come from some burning bridge. That would seem to indicate that they must now be getting into the danger zone where Regulars and rebels were engaged in a game of tag, one side doing the chasing now, and the other presently turning the tables on them.

The little party had come down to more level ground and were heading for the railroad, when

Rob, chancing to look back, meaning to see how Tubby was coming along, made a discovery that gave him an unpleasant feeling.

"We're being pursued, boys!" he called out, thinking it best that all of them should know the truth at once, however unpleasant it might prove.

Of course there was an immediate craning of necks, and startled exclamations from the other chums.

"Two dozen, if there's a man!" cried Merritt.

"And Mexican Regulars, too, for they wear uniforms, which the rebels don't!" added Andy. "Looks like we might be in for a lively run, doesn't it, Rob? And with our horses anything but fresh into the bargain!"

"Ginger snaps and pop guns!" Tubby was heard to say; "that settles my hash all right!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE WHISTLE OF PASSING BULLETS.

"They seem to be gaining on us!" said Merritt uneasily. "Hadn't we better romp ahead a little faster, boys?"

"Sure! Hit up the pace all you want!" It was neither Rob nor Andy who made this game reply, but Tubby! This response drew Rob's heart closer to the fat chum than ever before. A fellow who could show such nerve would have the best chance in the world to become a first-class scout, when once he woke up and began to study as he should.

They proceeded to coax their horses to pick up some, and for a time the gallant animals did manage more than to hold their own with the pursuers; but when half an hour had passed even Tubby could see that the distance separating them from that hustling lot of hard riders did not appear to be quite as great as after the spurt.

"Say, do we fight for it if we are cornered?" Andy wanted to know. When the patrol leader

turned to glance back at him, he saw that while the boy's face might be somewhat pale, there was a dogged look around the eyes that spoke volumes.

"Well, they say that Boy Scouts never should fight unless driven into a corner, where they have to defend themselves to save their own lives, or the lives of others," Rob shouted back.

"That settles it, then," Andy replied. And Rob could see that considerable of his anxiety must have been connected with his doubt as to whether it should be their duty as lovers of peace to give up and surrender without striking a blow, or resist; for he even seemed tickled with what Rob had told him.

No one asked Tubby what he thought about matters. It was enough for them to know that the fat and clumsy chum was there in his saddle still, and managing by some means to keep close behind them. His horse must have suffered exceedingly, bearing all that heavy load; and it was lucky Rob had been wise enough to select an especially sturdy beast when thinking of Tubby.

The pursuers were not all in a bunch, but scattered, according to the ability of their mounts

to maintain the killing pace. Undoubtedly, they were urged on by the big cruel Mexican spurs, which, of course, every cavalryman wore on his boot heels.

This might seem to be a trifling matter; but Rob knew better. If it really came to a running fight, as seemed likely, they would profit by the fact that only a minority of their pursuers could fire upon them, the rest being either too far off, or else fearful lest they might hit their comrades in advance.

Meanwhile they were approaching the big smoke that kept rising ahead, and which must mean a burning bridge on the railroad, and perhaps a stalled train into the bargain.

Rob found himself wondering what sort of reception they would receive should they find a party of Villa's rebels holding out against the Regulars. He had already laid his plans and communicated them to his chums, so that each would know just what was expected of him in the emergency.

Already several shots had been fired by the leading horsemen, but as they were still pretty far distant, and as it is next to impossible to do any serious business with a gun while going at

such headlong speed, of course these were sent after the fugitives more as an act of bravado and alarm, than in the hope that any bullet might find its mark.

At the same time it was not very pleasant for the scouts to hear those leaden messengers singing so merrily through the air over their heads, —for all the world like so many bees or locusts, as they afterward decided.

Every time a gun sounded, Tubby involuntarily ducked his head and tried to flatten himself out on the neck of his horse, an utterly impossible thing, on account of his build. He seemed to think that they must always pick him out for a target, because he offered such a fine mark.

"Guess you'd do the same, too," he called out to Andy, when he saw the grin on the other's face as he turned in time to see one of these performances, "if you made a shining mark like I do! And being in the rear adds to my chance of stopping one of those lead pills. Anyway, I'm going to do the trick right along, no matter what you think, Andy Bowles!"

"And you're right about that, Tubby!" called Merritt. "Even when you lie down flat you make a better mark than most of us do sitting up!"

"Keep your breath, fellows; you may need all of it!" Rob called out just then, and this stopped the controversy.

Rob urged his horse alongside that of the Mexican guide.

"How are we going to come out of it, Lopez?" he asked anxiously. "Will they get at us before we make the smoke?"

The experienced eye of the other had before now accurately measured the distances; and doubtless he was figuring matters out at the time the scout broke in with this leading question.

"If no bad luck," Lopez assured him, "we surely come to the burning bridge before the wolf pack doubles us up, young señor."

"By bad luck you mean an accident?" Rob demanded.

Lopez shrugged his shoulders and cast a swift, meaning look back at poor fat Tubby, who was belaboring his tired mount with the flat of one hand, and urging the beast on and on. Evidently the guide had been half expecting an accident to happen in this quarter for some time, and was, in fact, surprised that the clumsy scout had held on so long; but then, he did not know what a stubborn nature Tubby possessed.

"Si, señor, a horse might slip, and toss his rider; or it may be a passing bullet happen to go in the wrong place and do damage. Who can tell? But let us hope it will not so bad as that prove. We are doing well; and the smoke, it is not so far away as it seems!"

All of which must have been poor satisfaction to Rob, who from that moment found himself enduring new agonies every time he twisted around to see whether Tubby still held forth.

The horses were reeking with sweat, and while Rob did not pretend to be as experienced in such matters as a cow puncher would be, still even he understood that this sort of thing could not be kept up much longer.

Only for the presence of that smoke and the hope that they might run upon some friendly rebels at the burning bridge, he would have made up his mind that there was no other way for them to escape save by turning at bay and engaging in a regular fight with those persistent pursuers, who kept dogging the heels of their horses mile after mile, bent on running them down.

"What do you think of our chances for finding some of Villa's men ahead?" Rob asked the guide

several minutes later. They were still keeping up a furious pace and fairly holding their own, though none of the horses in the race could be said to be running as fast as half an hour previously.

"It is an open chance," Lopez replied with another shrug.

"But the Federals set the bridge on fire; and after doing that they would hardly hang around, because this part of the country must be swarming with rebels, who would be drawn to the burning bridge by the smoke. Is that the way you figure it out, Lopez?"

"You have said what was in my mind, young señor," came the reply; "and that is why I have kept moving on all this while. Had it not been the hope of finding friends, before now they must have felt our lead."

"Then we're doing the right thing in trying to get to the bridge before letting them come up on us," Rob decided. And after that he bent his whole energy to carrying out the plan he had arranged.

He even fell back so that he could ride alongside Tubby; for Rob had often heard that no chain can be any stronger than its weakest link;

and this must surely mean Tubby, in their case. If any accident befell the party, the chances were as ten to one it would spring from the fat scout.

And so Rob, believing in being prepared to meet things as they come along, even went so far as to figure out just what his course of action must be in case Tubby gave signs of falling off his horse, or the animal tripped in its headlong flight.

"It's only a little further, Tubby, so try your best to hold out!" he kept saying. "See, there's a spur of the hill jutting out, and the railroad comes around that. On the other side must be the Carmen River, where the bridge that is burning crosses. Just one more push and we'll be there in great shape. You're doing fine, I want to tell you, Tubby; I never thought you had it in you; and we're bound to get through this ride all right, believe me!"

No doubt this sort of encouraging talk did more than a little to keep Tubby from throwing up the sponge entirely; for he was close upon the point of complete exhaustion, and ready to own himself "all in."

"Try to think and tell me, Tubby," Rob went on earnestly, "where you've got those signal flags

you brought all the way down here, because you said they might come in handy. I can use one right now, I believe."

"Reach in that pocket on the side of my bag toward you, Rob," replied Tubby in a gasping whisper. "You ought to find the lot there."

This Rob managed to do in spite of the fact that both horses were galloping at headlong speed.

Just then they cleared the point of the hill that jutted out close to the railroad track; and there in front of them lay the cause of the big smoke. The bridge was afire, just as they had believed. There was also a train stalled on the side near them, with its engine headed toward Juarez. Doubtless this was the one of which the boys had heard, which, starting from Chihuahua, laden with refugee Mexican families wanting to seek shelter over in Texas, had been lost somewhere on the way, held up by burned bridges, and possibly by other things in the way of damage done to the locomotive by the Federal's marauding cavalry parties.

As soon as Rob could manage to see what lay ahead, he felt cheered by the sight; for behind the cars he discovered dozens of men with guns,

who seemed to be making a barrier of the train and exchanging long distance shots with some enemy perched upon the higher ground, undoubtedly Federals.

There seemed nothing for the scouts to do but to join their fortunes with those men of Villa's command who were holding the Regulars at bay. So, without slackening the speed of their horses a particle, the little party galloped forward, Rob leading the van and wildly waving one of the signal flags, which, being white with a small red center, could be looked upon as a flag of truce, and would surely keep the rebels from firing on them.

It must have astonished those fellows who were making a rampart of the stalled train to discover thus a party wearing khaki uniforms so like those of the American soldiers across the border, coming at headlong speed toward them, and being fired after by a pack of pursuers whom they readily recognized to be the regular troops of Huerta!

And since all enemies of the prevailing government must be looked on as friends to their cause, the Constitutionalists, as the rebels liked to call themselves, made no attempt to halt the

advance of the Boy Scouts. They held their fire, waiting until the hard-pressed fugitives could reach shelter, when explanations might be in order.

But the unseen Regulars perched among the rocks on the hillside must have discovered that those they were engaged in fighting seemed to be receiving unexpected reinforcements, for they turned their attention to the oncoming riders, and once more the nerve-racking zip-zip of passing bullets gave Tubby a cold chill.

CHAPTER XVIII.

AT THE BURNING BRIDGE.

It was really only the bad marksmanship of the men among the rocks some distance away, and the fact that the boys were now strung out in a disorganized line as they drew near the stalled train that saved the scouts from disaster, just as they saw a haven of refuge at hand.

The bullets continued to whine around them in a most disagreeable manner; while some, falling short, tore up the ground, causing little patches of dust to leap upward where they struck.

Tubby must have lived hours during those few but exciting minutes. Then, to his great satisfaction he found himself riding behind the cars of the train, where there were scores of people hiding, men, women and children, fugitives from the city that had fallen into Villa's hands once more. Some may have fled for fear that the rebel leader would confiscate all their possessions, because they had been on friendly terms with the troops of Huerta when the Government forces held the capital of Chihuahua State.

No one could say with what relief Tubby checked the onward rush of his charger; Rob did not have to come to his assistance this time, for the exhausted boy actually fell from the saddle, being caught by several grim rebels, who had come crowding around to find out who these parties were, and how it came that American soldiers dared invade the sacred soil of Mexico,—which, had it been an actual fact, would have served to unite both hostile factions against Uncle Sam's boys in khaki.

But Lopez had unlimbered his tongue by now, and was rattling off the greatest lot of jargon in Spanish the boys had ever listened to. They could only understand a word here and there; but that did not matter, for as he talked the guide made many gestures, and it was possible to tell what he was saying from these alone.

Many of the rebels crowded close around them, forming a circle, ten deep. Others had hurried to exchange shots with the late pursuers of the boys, and opened such a warm fire that the Regulars quickly turned and fled, doubtless to join later on with their comrades among the rocks, and plot to overwhelm the defenders of the stalled train.

When the name of General Villa was mentioned several times, and always with a grand sweep of the arm in the direction of the four scouts, Rob knew that Lopez was surely "spreading it on pretty thick." He must be telling the crowd that these gringo lads were great friends of the commanding general, and that they had come all the way down here, hundreds, yes, thousands of miles, just to see him, and tell him what a great patriot he was. And if this were so, then they must be looked on as comrades by every man who fought under Villa the Great; who would be very angry with any wretch so unlucky as to raise a finger to offend those whose friendship he valued so highly.

Of course such talk created no end of a sensation among the rough men who were enlisted in the cause of the revolutionists. They feared their commanding general more than any man on earth; and after hearing what Lopez had to say about these American boys, they were ready to give them a wild cheer; especially when told that the newcomers stood ready to cast their lot in with them, and help disperse the enemy.

When the guide, turning to Rob, told him about what he had promised the rebels in return

The bullets continued to whine around them in a most disagreeable manner.—*Page* 190.

for the protection they were giving the fugitives, the patrol leader looked a bit grave.

"Of course we're willing to do all we can, you understand, Lopez, to help our new friends out; and if anybody is wounded, we know a whole lot about how to take care of bad hurts; in other ways, too, we'll do all we can; but except as a very last resort, I wouldn't want to shoot direct at those men over there. We're not soldiers, even if we do wear a uniform that seems to say we are; and the last thing a Boy Scout wants to do is to fight. But wait and see how things turn out. There are lots of ways we can assist without actually using our guns against the Regulars; though if it came to the worst, and they were charging this fort, you'd soon see how we'd pitch in and do our part."

After that Rob and his three chums noticed that they were being observed with even more curiosity. Later on it turned out that the cunning Lopez, meaning to do things wholesale while about it, had hinted that these young fellows might be secret messengers to Villa coming from Washington; and that there was a strong chance that the American Government was meaning finally to befriend the rebels, even allowing them

to get arms at will from across the border. In this way they might be helped to hasten the fall of Huerta, who had never been recognized as president by the new administration.

Meanwhile, the fire of the Federals up there among the rocks had entirely ceased. Tubby, not being versed in such things, believed that the coming of reinforcements, in the shape of four boys and one man, must have given the Federals what he chose to call "cold feet," and that they had betaken themselves off. Rob, however, knew differently, for by using that convenient field glass of his, he could see that there were several men still up there. Evidently some sort of new scheme was being figured out by those who were besieging the train; and unless the defenders managed to learn its nature in advance, they might be given a disagreeable surprise shortly.

This gave Rob an idea.

Just as he had told Lopez, while the scouts would not like to be asked to fire on the enemy, unless the defenders of the train were hard pushed, there were plenty of ways whereby wide-awake young chaps, such as they were known to be, might make themselves useful.

He saw such an opening right then, and quickly began to look into it more closely to find out if it were indeed practicable.

Examining the topography of the country through his glasses, Rob found that it was possible for a smart fellow to climb up to a certain point, where he could observe all that was going on beyond, and doubtless find plenty of chances to transmit his discoveries to the other scouts below by means of a signal flag and the wigwag code. There was Tubby, who had done himself more credit with signal work than along any other line connected with scout activities; why should he not keep himself in readiness to receive whatever news the vidette on the pinnacle of rock chose to send?

After speaking about this idea to Lopez, and asking him to pass it along to the rather fierce-looking individual who seemed to be in command of the rebels, Rob sought out the fat chum.

As more than a full hour had passed since their arrival at the still burning railroad bridge, it was to be hoped that Tubby had, in some measure at least, recovered from his state of exhaustion, and that he would be in fit condition to manage his end of the receiving line.

As he drew near the spot where he had discovered Tubby squatted like a big bull frog on the ground, Rob had to smile to notice how carefully the fat scout had folded his blanket several times and used it as a seat; for Rob knew the reason why.

"Now I wonder what he is looking at so seriously," he said to himself on drawing closer. "It can't be either the magic ring that's going to make General Villa fall on our necks and embrace us, nor yet that paper Uncle Mark gave us for his old time friend; because I happen to have both on my person right now."

His curiosity aroused by Tubby's seeming fit of abstraction, Rob crept softly up behind the other and peered over his shoulder. What he saw caused him to chuckle, as though more amused than ever.

Tubby had something in his hand, at which he was staring, all the while muttering to himself; and Rob could even catch what he was saying. It ran something like this:

"That's a bully clew, all right, all right. Rob says so, and he ought to know. And you needn't think that I'm going to let the whole thing drop, just because I've been too busy with other jobs

to follow it up. Just you wait till I get back, and see if I don't find the identical brace and bit that coward used to bore a hole in the bottom of Rob's sailboat, and make this creased shaving in the shape of a curl. And say, bet you that when I happen to mention the name of Max Ramsay I'm not very far away from the guilty party; though I ought not to accuse anybody till I'm dead sure.

"Oh! hello! that you, Rob? What's new? I was only making sure that I hadn't gone and lost that marked shaving we found in your boat, you remember, and which some fine day is going to make some feller I know start to shivering in his shoes. Sit down with me, won't you? I'd offer you a bit of my cushion, but seems like I can't spare it just now; you understand why."

"Yes, that's all right, Tubby, and small blame to you if you do feel badly. It was a tough ride for us all; and yet we ought to thank our lucky stars that we found a chance to give our pursuers the slip without a fight. But I wanted to ask if you thought you could bother taking a few short messages with the wigwag flags?"

Tubby became interested at once, and almost forgot how tired and sore he felt.

"Sure I can, and only too glad to be doing something in my particular line, Rob," he hastened to remark. "And it's just fine of you to come to *me,* when there's Merritt and Andy around. But what's doing? Have the Feds been sending messages, and do you want me to intercept what they say? Is that the game, Rob?"

"You're away off there, Tubby," replied the patrol leader; "but if you listen I'll try to explain. The idea struck me that perhaps I might manage to climb to that high rock you can see up there, and watch what the enemy is doing; because they must be up to some mischief, they keep so quiet lately. And after I get there you must stand by to take what I send and write it down. Have the other boys around to help, because three heads are better than one in receiving. If you should get all muddled up one of the others may carry the message through."

"Whee! that's a mighty clever scheme of yours, Rob; and if I wasn't so beastly tired and lame I'd ask to be allowed to go along with you. But p'raps it's better not, for the climbing would be tough, and I'm nearly all in for one day. But please don't go off alone that way, Rob, without carrying your gun along. Some of the tricky

Regulars might manage to cut you off from us. And then wouldn't you be in a nice scrape without some means for defending yourself? You will, Rob, won't you?"

"Why, yes, I had thought it might be a bit foolish not to, with a chance always hanging over my head that I'd need something like a gun. But you can keep right on sitting here if you like, only turn around so you will have that crag in full view. Of course I don't know just how long it will take me to climb up there, because if they glimpse me they'll as like as not keep firing every time I show my head. But I ought to know how to creep, scout fashion. I've practiced it enough, goodness knows. Is it all understood, and have you the other flags handy? I want to take two along with me, after I've fastened them to a couple of sticks so I can wave them the right way, though I may only need one."

Tubby told him that all was clear, and Rob promised to send Merritt around to fix the other flags.

"When the time comes for you to send the first signal, guess I'll be able to get on my feet," the fat scout said as Rob moved away; "and if I

can't make it alone, I reckon the boys'll give me a boost. You put your faith in me to get whatever you wigwag, Rob; but take mighty good care of yourself, hear?"

So the patrol leader went away, bearing the two white and red flags, which he meant to rig out with short staves before he started on his perilous mission to the crag that jutted out far up the slope. From there a splendid view could undoubtedly be obtained, not only of the stalled train and the burning bridge, but also of the Federal cavalrymen who were keeping out of sight among the small *arroyos* along the hillside.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE WIGWAG TALK.

"Don't you think Rob ought to be pretty nearly up there by now, boys?" Tubby was asking, when about half an hour had crept by since the patrol leader left them.

He had become quite anxious, so much so, in fact, that with many grunts and "whees" he had actually managed to get upon his feet. Either Andy or Merritt would have been only too willing to lend the fat chum a helping hand, but Tubby was more or less proud and sensitive; he might accept assistance from Rob, who never made a habit of laughing in his face, but it was a different matter when any of the other scouts were concerned.

Then he had practiced waving his signal flags to and fro, making those particular movements that stood for letters in the Myers' code of wigwagging. These had been readily interpreted by both Merritt and Andy, who were fairly up in the service, and could also relay messages by

heliograph, using a bit of broken mirror to flash the rays of the sun from hilltop to valley.

"I'm looking to see him show up any old time now," Andy replied; for he was at that moment standing with his eyes glued on the lofty crag, from which the signal-sender expected to wave his message when the time came.

"But none of us have so much as glimpsed our chum even once on his way up there," Tubby complained; "which I take it is kind of queer. Gee! I hope nothing's happened to Rob! That would be a calamity, sure!"

"Oh! don't worry about Rob," Andy cautioned him; "he knows how to look out for himself, all right. You don't find *him* stumbling over roots and all sorts of things like—er—some of the rest of us fellows. No danger of Rob bringing up in one of those deep, dry ravines they call *arroyos* down here in Old Mexico."

"Yes, but sometimes accidents do happen even to the smartest scouts, don't they?" the fat boy persisted in saying, as though bent on allowing his feeling of anxiety to have full sway. "Huh! haven't you ever had a limb break when you believed it to be good and strong; or a stone slip out from under your foot, throwing you on your

face? Even Rob, clever as he is, might run across a piece of bad luck. Then, how d'ye know but that one or two of those greaser cavalrymen might not have been camping somewhere along the trail Rob followed, and seeing him coming, decided to lie in ambush to knock him over? Any way, I'm getting what my mother calls 'fidgetty'; and I'll be glad when it's all over."

"Well, chirk up, then, Tubby!" exclaimed Merritt just then, with a low laugh.

"Oh! did you see him, Merritt? And is that why you speak so encouragingly?" demanded the stout boy with quivering lips and a look of intense eagerness on his round face.

The corporal of the Eagles nodded his head in the affirmative.

"Yes, I'm dead sure I had a glimpse of his khaki coat close to the crag, just while you were talking in such a gloomy way; and if you wait two minutes, chances are you'll see him wave his flag to let us know he has arrived."

"Bully for you, Merritt; that's the best news I've had for a 'coon's age.' But it is too bad we didn't think to bring a couple of mirrors along with us on this trip. Then, you know, we could have carried on our little confab by flashes of the

heliograph. It's a whole lot easier than wigwag work, where your arms get so tired waving flags."

"There! See what's happened?" cried Andy suddenly.

"It's Rob, as sure as anything!" exclaimed the pleased Tubby. "He got up to that rock all right, didn't he? Watch him wave the O. K. sign, will you? And now I guess he'll take a good look around, so as to locate the enemy, and then begin to tell us what's doing."

Evidently Rob was taking advantage of his elevated position to survey the surrounding country in all directions. It would doubtless pay the besieged rebel forces to know what was going on, and if there was any hope of assistance coming to help drive the foe away.

The minutes began to drag horribly to impatient Tubby, and doubtless to the other scouts as well. They could see that Rob was turning this way and that, as though making good use of the excellent field glasses he had thought to carry with him on his ascent.

"Why doesn't he hurry and send something?" Tubby muttered for the tenth time as he walked to and fro, partly to work off his excitement,

and partly to avoid the stiffness that overtook him whenever he stood still. "Here I'm all primed up for business at the old stand, and ready to receive any message that may come. I've practiced the whole code over and over, you notice, fellers; and if I do say it myself, that shouldn't, I never felt in such good trim as right now. If only Rob would get busy and whisper something! He must have learned a heap by now. Why, it seems like half an hour since he bobbed up serenely there!"

"Less than ten minutes, Tubby, because I timed him," interposed Merritt.

"Well, long enough for him to take a squint at a whole circle and see all sorts of things," grumbled Tubby, quite disconsolate over the delay. "If this keeps up, it's going to wear me away to a skeleton, that's what."

"No danger, Tubby, of that happening," declared Andy.

"And get busy now," added Merritt. "There comes your first signal! He is asking if you are ready to take a message. Answer him O. K., Tubby."

"Hurray! Now mebbe there won't be some-

thing doing!" exclaimed the other, aroused to a full consciousness that duty called.

Tubby in action was a sight to behold. He was so fat that, when his chubby arms got to working vigorously, he looked something like a Dutch windmill with the sails flapping furiously in a half gale.

But Tubby knew his Myers' wigwag code all right, and could receive better than nearly any fellow on the roster of the Eagle Patrol. When one masters the art of taking a message with fair speed, sending is what Tubby always called "pie." This is also the case in telegraph work. In sending, one knows in advance what is coming, and the brain can work ahead, but this is not so in receiving.

Rob made his flag do its duty with a vigor that kept both Tubby and Merritt keyed up to top notch in order to read the message, while, as the fat scout called out the letters, Andy wrote them down.

And this was what the boy on the rocky crag sent as a beginning:

"Can see enemy—number about sixty in sight —have started to turn flank, and make attack from other side—warn Lopez!"

That was alarming news, because, if the movement were undertaken without any notice to the rebel force, they would undoubtedly be caught napping; and it does not require much of a surprise to create a panic with troops who are unseasoned fighters.

"But how could they cross over to the other side of the railroad without being seen, I want to know?" Tubby asked, after the whole message had been received.

"We can't tell that from here, but you bet your boots Rob knows," Andy was quick to reply, showing what an amount of confidence the boys of the Eagle Patrol were wont to place in their recognized leader under any and all conditions.

"Yes, that's right," Merritt added. "It might be there is some gully that the road spans, which we didn't notice when making our dash here, where the Federals could dodge through without anybody being a whit the wiser. Anyway, Rob says that's what they mean to do, which settles it, Tubby."

"There, he's waving again!" called out the observant Andy. "Quick, get busy and let him know you're ready to take the next message, Tubby!"

"On deck!" chirped the receiving end of the air telegraph, which the boys often called their "wireless."

This time Rob went on a little further. Possibly he may have guessed that what he sent before was apt to mystify the boys, and wished to make it plainer. At any rate he took up the very subject they had just been discussing, as though he had some means of overhearing their little talk.

"One mile above, track passes over a little gulch. Shallow, but deep enough to answer purpose. Can see soldiers crawling under right now. Rocks lie beyond, and from that easy to creep close to train there. Warn Lopez, and have him tell captain of rebel forces. Get all that?"

Now came Tubby's turn.

Really, all he had to send back was the "O. K." signal, showing that he had read everything that had been sent; but, then, Tubby was a good talker, and it was hard for him to resist a golden opportunity like the present, where he could display his knowledge along the line of flirting with the flags.

So he started the wave, and in another minute was working industriously.

"Don't think we missed a single letter," he told

the boy on the crag; "and you sure sent faster than ever before in your life. What are we to do if they attack the train? Ought we to join in and use our guns? We want to know, because it might be too late when you get back. Answer."

The two watching boys had started to spell out Tubby's message. Thinking it a waste of precious time at first, Merritt had even started forward to object when he caught some of the later words, and this halted him. After all, it was not so far out of the way for Tubby to want to know what their line of conduct should be under certain conditions. They had not anticipated anything like this when Rob left; and, as he was their leader, all orders had to come from him.

On this account, then, they waited to see what the answer would be. Apparently Rob had made out what Tubby asked, for he at once sent another message. As the letters followed each other in quick succession, even Andy could read their import.

"Hold back all you can, unless it seems absolutely necessary to join in. We have come down here on a peaceful errand, and don't want to side with either force more than we can help. This is

a Mexican affair, and Uncle Sam is keeping his hands off. Understand?"

"What shall I tell him, Merritt?" questioned Tubby, eagerly waiting for orders, because, in the absence of the acting scout master and patrol leader, the corporal was looked upon as in charge.

"We'll try to be wise and cautious, tell Rob that," replied Merritt; "and we'll keep out of the muss till we think we've just *got* to help, in order to save our lives. That's all, Tubby."

Accordingly, Tubby started in again, for his arm had by now rested up more or less, so that he was in condition for work. The short message was possibly strung out considerably, because Tubby realized that in all probability it would be his last chance to flirt the flag, on this occasion, at least.

Then Rob waved them good-bye, and turned as though to take one last look over the country beyond, which was hidden from the sight of the boys at the stalled train.

Tubby still remained on his feet, though casting anxious eyes toward the spot where the comfortable blanket seat had been temporarily left, while Merritt was going over the message Andy had written down, so that he could give it to Lo-

pez accurately for transmission to the rebel captain.

All at once Andy uttered an exclamation. There was such a note of alarm in his voice that Merritt looked up from his paper, and Tubby whirled around so as to face the other.

"What ails you now, Andy?" demanded Merritt.

"It's Rob!" exclaimed the scout addressed. "I just saw several soldiers creeping along the trail he must use coming back; and they mean to lie in ambush for him!"

CHAPTER XX.

"TRUST ROB!"

When Andy said that, both Tubby and Merritt felt a cold chill pass over them. It could be easily understood that if those vindictive Regulars had a chance to fire on the unknown party who wore the khaki of the United States soldiers, and who, they must know, had been sending messages from the rock jutting out above, there was no reason to believe that they would have the least pity because he turned out to be a boy. There were many mere lads bearing arms among the followers of Villa and of President Huerta—there always are when revolution stalks through a land and war clouds are in the air—so that the taking of a boy's life did not mean anything unusual to these grim fighters.

But Merritt was alive to the importance of letting Rob know of the peril that was lying in wait for him on the back trail. If he slipped away and started to come down the side of the rugged slope, there was always a terrible chance that he might

know nothing of the three Mexican Regulars lying under the rocks like genuine bushwhackers, ready to pour a deadly volley in his direction as soon as they felt that he was in their grip.

"Quick, Tubby, try and attract his attention again—tell him for goodness' sake to wait up there and take another message!"

Merritt almost shrieked this as he sprang toward the fat chum. Tubby instantly started the human windmill in motion again, waving his flag at a great rate, and forming the signal "1111—3: Wait a moment," that would tell the boy on the crag there was still something of vast importance to be wigwagged to him.

"I can see him there yet!" said Andy, though his voice trembled as if he were quaking with suspense.

"Yes, but his back is this way!" groaned Tubby, still keeping busy with his flags.

Merritt even put his hands to his mouth and shouted the name of the patrol leader several times, as though hoping with this primitive megaphone to be able to attract the attention of the other; but apparently sounds did not travel upward as well as they do on the level ground. At any rate, they could not see Rob give the first sign

of turning; and he seemed to be busy watching something beyond, perhaps the soldiers who were crawling through that little ravine under the railroad track, a mile or more away.

"What if he starts down without once looking this way?" asked Andy.

"Oh! Ginger snaps and popguns! Don't mention it!" groaned Tubby.

"But that wouldn't be like Rob!" asserted Merritt, just as though he might be trying the best way he knew to bolster up his own courage with this hope. "It would be more his style to take a last look this way to see if we had scattered to carry out his orders. Keep doing it right along, Tubby, while we all watch and hope he'll turn around soon!"

It was an anxious time for those three lads, and one they were not likely to forget soon, either.

All at once a whoop went up from Tubby.

"He's turned around, and is looking this way!" he exclaimed.

"Keep going, then; faster, Tubby!" cried Merritt. "Tell him to wait up—very important!"

"There he is, starting in to wave!" cried Andy.

"W-h-a-t d-o y-o-u w-a-n-t?" came the ques-

tion from above, with every one of the three eager scouts below spelling it aloud.

"Stay where you are—great danger—three Federals in hiding on trail you took going up. If you must come down, pick another route!"

Tubby sent all of this, Merritt supplying him with the words in rotation; and evidently it was read correctly, for immediately after the message ceased, Rob sent back his "O. K.," and added: "Don't fear for me; I can take care of myself. So long!"

"He's gone!" cried Tubby, as the last fluttering letter came from above.

"Yes, and slipped out of sight just as if he meant to come back the same way he took going!" interjected Andy in dismay.

"That's all right," added Merritt. "Don't you see it must have been just a clever little stunt of Rob's, meant to fool the three cavalrymen who are lying in wait down on that depressed route he took going up? He reckons that they've been watching him all this while. So he just made out to have no suspicion that he knew about their game. Trust our Rob for keeping his wits about him! He'll slip around somehow, and leave them in the lurch."

"Say, I hope now none of that outfit can read wigwag work!" Tubby remarked, with a new line of trouble appearing on his usually smooth forehead. "Because then they'd know what I told Rob, and of course they'd change their position so as to cover the ground all along."

"Not one chance in a thousand that a single Federal ever took a lesson in signal work with the flags," Merritt told him. But evidently he was not so wholly free from fears himself, for immediately afterward he went on to say: "Perhaps I'd better be hunting Lopez up and telling him all that's happened. Out of gratitude for what Rob has done to save them from being taken by surprise, these rebels may consent to make a little sortie and chase the three fellows up there away."

"A splendid idea, Merritt!" declared Andy, while Tubby burst out:

"Gee! but wouldn't it be just glorious to turn the tables on that lot and send them flying over the hill? Hurry up, and see if you can't get our rebel friends to make a start. They could charge right up that hill and scare the ambushers off like hot cakes. Go along, Merritt, and don't let the grass grow under your feet!"

Merritt was off even while Tubby spoke. He

was something like Rob, for whenever he had an idea he believed in carrying it out with speed. In this case it was essential that no time should be lost, for at any minute one of the armed men who lay there in wait for Rob might find an opportunity to get a shot at him, with a result that neither Tubby nor Andy dared allow themselves to consider.

Both of them continued to stand there, keeping their eyes glued on the side of the rise, at about the spot where they knew the soldiers lay hidden. More than a few times one or the other believed he could detect some slight movement, as though the men might be taking an observation; but the distance was so great they could not be sure, and no doubt their fears magnified many things.

"He's found Lopez, and is talking to him right now!" Andy said, referring to Merritt, after a little time had elapsed.

"Yes, and you can see that our guide believes the news mighty important, because already he's beckoning to that captain who's carrying a sword, even if he hasn't any uniform," Tubby continued. "I hope now the feller isn't going to show the white feather and just shrug his shoulders the way they're so fond of doing down here, as much

as to say Rob'll have to take care of himself. That would be a burning shame, wouldn't it, Andy?"

"But I don't believe they'll act that way," the other told him consolingly. "I reckon these rebels are fighters, and they'll think it a bully good chance to get one back on the enemy by knocking over three of the Regulars. See, he's showing a whole lot of interest right now. There, Merritt is pointing up at the place where we know the ambushers are squatting. Will they sally out and chase them away? Oh! I hope so, I hope they will!"

"It looks as though they might be thinking of doing that very thing, doesn't it, Tubby?" Andy again burst out, a ring of satisfaction in his boyish voice. "See, that captain is yelling something to his men, for a lot of them are running up, waving their guns, and chattering all sorts of things—like a pack of monkeys finding a cocoanut. Make your mind easy, Tubby; there's going to be something doing soon!"

All Tubby made answer was expressed in one word:

"Bully!"

Evidently Merritt had managed to tell Lopez

what a great service Rob had done in making his way to the top of the elevation, and sending word as to what the enemy was doing; and the guide had in turn transmitted this to the rebel chief, upon whom it must have made considerable impression, for he was plainly excited and bent upon discharging his obligations toward the signal sender, according to the plan suggested by the Eagle's corporal.

A dozen men were told off and given hurried instructions. They immediately ran the length of the train, and then with loud shouts and waving guns started for the foot of the rise, not bothering to take the trouble Rob had done to keep their movements secret. In fact, they must have meant to let the three Regulars know of their intentions as they scattered and started to climb the hill.

"There! Listen to that, will you?" shrilled the excited Tubby.

"It was a gunshot, sure as anything!" added Andy, hardly less stirred himself. "And I saw the puff of smoke up yonder where the three Regulars are hiding! Guess they know the game is up and mean to have a few cracks at the climbing rebels before they skip out!"

"And there goes a shot from below," said Tubby, "showing that our friends don't mean that the fun shall all be on one side. Yes, and listen to how the dogs of war keep on barking, will you, Andy? Whee! isn't this exciting, though? I can just imagine how the bullets sing as they fly past! Hear 'em slash against the rocks! That will make 'em flatten out like pancakes!"

"All the while the rebels are climbing right along and getting nearer and nearer," Andy remarked, though not once could he tear his eyes away from the scene upon the side of the elevation. "They may hang on there too long, and find it a hard job to make their get-away, after all."

"I hope Rob isn't in line with all this shooting, or that he happens to run across the Regulars when they're making off!" Tubby pursued, voicing his fears.

"Trust Rob, Tubby; give him credit for horse sense, won't you?" scoffed the other scout. "And let me tell you, Tubby, that, if they do run across him, chances are they'll be sorry! Remember, Rob's got a gun along with him, and you've seen yourself how he could shoot at flying game

many's the time. If he has to defend himself, he'll wing that lot in one, two, three order, give you my word for it!"

"I know that, Andy, as well as you do," agreed the fat boy; "and I guess I'm only saying what I do because my nerves are all unstrung. It's just awful to have to stand here watching, not able to lift a finger to help our chum! If I could only be in the thick of the thing, I wouldn't be croaking like this."

"I believe you, Tubby," said Merritt, who had come up in time to hear the last few sentences spoken by the others. "But there's little danger of Rob falling into a trap, now that he's been warned. I wouldn't be surprised if he's just been lying low all this time in some nice hole under a rock, waiting to find out what would happen. To tell the truth, I'm more concerned about the rebels shooting at Rob, under the belief that he's one of the enemy, than that those three Federals will catch him napping."

Unfortunately, these words gave poor Tubby fresh cause for alarm.

"Oh! I hope that doesn't happen," he kept on saying, as they all stood and watched the little puffs of smoke that broke out in ever so many

places along the side of the rugged slope. These told that the rebels were advancing steadily upward toward the spot where the men who had meant to waylay the wigwag operator had taken up their positions.

All the people who had been on the stranded train, men, women and children, had come out of their various hiding-places, and now stood in groups, along with the rebels at bay, behind the line of cars. Their eyes were glued on what was happening up there on the heights. For by now it had been circulated that one of the Americano boys had gone aloft to spy upon the enemy, and had reported important news, which fact had acted so favorably on the commander of the Villa forces that he had sent a detachment of his men to try and save the gringo lad from being captured or shot.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE RETURN OF THE SCOUT MASTER.

The acting scout master of the Eagle Patrol was meanwhile making his way down the ragged face of the slope pretty much as Merritt had pictured him.

After giving that last "all right" wave of his flag, Rob had apparently started down toward the plain, and his course was, as nearly as could be seen, just the same as that he had taken in order to reach the crag from which he had wigwagged the news to his chums alongside the stalled train.

But this was only a "blind," intended to deceive the lurking Federals, if it happened that they were watching his movements. They would feel confident that, as he meant to retrace his steps, he would follow the line of least resistance. Then all that they would have to do in order to ambush him, would be to remain secreted in the cunningly arranged hiding-place where the other three scouts had seen them take their positions.

When Rob had reason to believe that he was

safe from observation, he set about changing his downward course. It was not very difficult to run across some other descending gully or miniature *arroyo,* where in rainy weather doubtless copious streams of water flowed, but which now was quite dry. The face of the elevation was fairly scarred with such indentations.

The scout slipped along cleverly, stooping all of the time, and occasionally even dropping flat on his hands and knees, in order to crawl past a suspicious point, where the chances of exposure seemed greater.

Rob had practiced this sort of thing many a time just for the fun of it, when he and the other Eagles were camping out. Such tactics came well within the scope of actual scout work, for boys are expected to exert themselves while indulging in games that pertain to the open. They could imagine themselves Indians in the old days, when the copper-skinned natives of American forests had to depend on their skill as hunters, in order to secure their daily rations of food, because at that time there was no generous-handed Uncle Sam to issue such to them once in so many months as the wards of the nation.

This creeping game had always appealed to

Rob so strongly that he had taken particular pains to perfect himself in it, not dreaming how at some future day his knowledge of it might come in handy, as it was now doing.

There was no particular hurry, he decided, as he picked his way cautiously along among the rough rocks, always surveying the prospect ahead before actually trusting himself to move on a little distance. The Federals who were lying in ambush and waiting for him to come along would hardly get impatient enough to start to meet him, he concluded. And besides, there was another reason why he should allow some little time to elapse before trying to reach the foot of the descent.

He had tried to picture in his mind just what his three comrades would be doing in the matter, and he came to the conclusion that Merritt must certainly appeal to Lopez, in order to have the rebels try to raise the siege.

This they could easily do by dislodging the Federals who were in hiding on the return trail awaiting his approach.

Several times, when an opportunity occurred, Rob took occasion to raise his head slowly and peer over the top of some friendly rock. He

moved carefully so that he might not draw attention to the spot; and his motive was more to take a peep at the stalled train than any desire to find out what the enemy might be doing. In this way, then, he saw the dozen rebels finally make a sortie and run headlong for the foot of the height, just about as he had done; only they failed to take advantage of the chances there were for concealment, which he had utilized.

And he could also see that those at the train had gathered in a throng on that side toward the scene of action, as though deeply interested in the outcome.

Yes, there were Tubby, Merritt and Andy; he could plainly make them out with his naked eye, and knew that they must be very anxious concerning his safety. Rob was almost impelled to wave his signal flag, so that its familiar white and red combination would catch their watching eyes and tell them that thus far all was well, but he decided not to do it. How was he to tell but that enemies might be close by who would take advantage of his indiscretion to send a pattering shower of lead about his ears?

Once he half raised his field glasses, being tempted to make use of them in order to see bet-

ter what the boys were doing and whether they wore anxious expressions on their faces, as he believed would be the case. But again Rob's scout training held his hand, and he quickly decided that he would be taking too much risk. Then, too, the sun chanced to be shining in just such a way that if he moved the glasses it would be apt to flash a warning ray, very much on the order of the heliograph signals he was used to making with the aid of a broken piece of mirror, and such a slight thing might catch the suspicious eyes of those who lay in wait.

So Rob contented himself with taking another observation, and noting that the advancing rebels showed all the evidences of being very much in earnest.

All at once, even as he looked, he heard the quick detonation of a gun not far away from him. And at the same instant he saw a puff of white smoke burst out from a clump of rocks, showing that one of the Federals must be in hiding there.

Undoubtedly he was firing at the advancing rebels, understanding that they meant to dislodge himself and companions from their hiding-places on the hillside.

Derisive shouts answered the shot, and, so far as Rob could see, it had accomplished nothing save to let the rebels know that their intentions were understood, and that the concealed Federals would not run away without a fight.

Then came other shots. The second and third of those men who were lying in ambush had taken up the gage of battle, and were trying to wing some of the leaping, running rebels before they gained the shelter of the outlying rocks at the foot of the hill.

Nor were the men of Villa slow to return the fire, since they seemed to have an abundance of ammunition. And for a short time the guns popped merrily around that region.

It was rather fascinating to crouch there and watch the curls of smoke shooting up, telling Rob that he was looking upon a real battle on a small scale. Presently, however, when the bullets coming from various quarters below began to whine about his ears, the patrol leader decided that he had better draw in his head, very much after the manner of a tortoise, and make himself scarce, since he seemed to be in the line of fire.

Once, a little later, when he took another cautious observation as the shooting slackened, he

was thrilled to see a creeping soldier, clad in a dirty white uniform, not more than thirty yards away from him! Indeed, Rob could watch him carefully raise his head and look downward, as though marking the advance of the foe, so as to calculate on his line of retreat, and the expression on his swarthy face was plainly visible.

"How easy it would be for me to pick that fellow off, if I were a rebel right now," the boy told himself with something like a chuckle, as he slowly advanced his rifle under cover of the sheltering rock and drew a bead on the skulking figure in the Federal service uniform. But of course this was only a little act of boyish bravado, for Rob did not have the least temptation to fire and injure one of these men. He believed that Americans could as yet have no particular interest in this civil warfare that was going on south of the Rio Grande; and that the Mexicans would be all the better for settling their differences among themselves.

Of course, if it went too far, doubtless Uncle Sam, in his character of policeman for the Western Hemisphere, might have to intervene and try to restore peace to the harassed country of the dons.

Seeing which way the Federals were retreating, Rob changed his own course again. Of course he wanted to avoid any collision with the three who had been lying in ambush, and at the same time keep clear, as well as he could, of the advancing rebels until such time as he could let them know that he was a friend, and not an enemy. These fellows were only too ready with their guns to open fire on the slightest provocation, and Rob did not yearn to be made an object lesson.

"As like as not," he was saying to himself as he shifted his position again and again skillfully, "they'd bang away if they saw so much as the crown of my campaign hat, and then apologize in their Mexican way after they'd riddled me with bullets. But an ounce of prevention is a heap better than a pound of cure, and I guess I'll keep out of the way till the right time comes along to speak up."

And having thus made up his mind as to what his course of action would be, Rob began to hold back. He fancied that before long the advance rebels must be coming up, when he could get in touch with them, so as to let them know that the

enemy had slunk away after the manner of a beaten cur.

Five, ten minutes passed. There had not been a shot exchanged for all that time, and Rob was really beginning to grow impatient, when he fancied he caught the mutter of voices. Taking another careful peep, he discovered several men, whom he recognized as rebels, for they were armed, alert, and wore no uniforms whatever.

So the scout waved his signal flag above the rock, and at the same time called out in a loud voice a word that he knew stood for "friend."

"Amigo! amigo!"

Quickly he saw that they understood, because they were making motions for him to come forth. And, feeling that there was no longer anything to fear, Rob proceeded to emerge from his place of concealment.

Of course he could not converse in the Mexican lingo, which is supposed to be a corruption of Spanish, but then, knowing a few words and being able to gesticulate fairly well, Rob managed to give them the information that the Regulars had taken themselves off, so that it was really useless to remain up there on the hill, when the

presence of every man would soon be needed down by the train.

Accordingly the party started downgrade and soon came to the level. Their appearance in the open was greeted by vociferous *"Bravos"* by all the assembled Mexicans; and from the racket one might fancy that those gallant fighters had utterly annihilated a whole army of the enemy. Spanish-American dispositions are ever excitable, and whatever they do is generally accomplished with much noise and confusion.

It thrilled Rob to the heart, though, to hear the shouts of his three chums above all the rest of the noise; and he knew that they were feeling better satisfied than all the rest to see him come out of the lively little engagement unscathed.

He believed that he had some news for them later on that would bolster up their faltering spirits; but first of all preparations must be started toward meeting successfully this coup on the part of the Regulars.

Tubby could not wait for Rob to reach them, but in his customary warm-hearted manner he pushed away beyond the border of the throng and met the returning scout.

"Let me tell you we're mighty happy to see

you back without a scratch, after all that cannonading along the side of the mountain!" Tubby exclaimed, as he pounced on Rob's hand and wrung it "like a pump handle."

"And I'm a bit glad myself to get back in good shape, believe me," Rob told him. "After I've had a chance to shake hands all around we ought to get busy doing something to better our conditions here; because in half an hour or so the Federals calculate to open on us from both sides, in what is called an enfilading fire. Hurrah, boys! Well, Merritt, I guess we're showing the natives what Boy Scouts can do, eh?"

CHAPTER XXII.

THE FIELD HOSPITAL IN OPERATION.

"What happened to the ambushers, Rob?" Andy inquired.

The scout master was beginning to look around in the throng of cheering Mexicans for Lopez, who must again act as interpreter for him if he expected the rebel captain to grasp certain ideas he had evolved while slowly making his way down from the lofty lookout.

"Oh!" replied Rob, with a laugh, "they slid out from under when things began to get too warm for their blood."

"What! d'ye mean they got clear away, and never left one feller on the gory field of action?" grumbled Tubby.

"Why, you're getting real blood-thirsty, Tubby!" said Rob. "I'm surely astonished to hear you talk like that!"

"But wouldn't it give you a real hard pain to see how the fellers that came back with you are strutting around and grinning! Why, that little

runt with the gay jacket slaps himself on his chest every half minute, like he'd knocked over sixteen Regulars all by his lonely! What airs they take on! And yet you say every Fed got clean away? Huh! we've heard a heap of shootin' since we came on the spot; but only one man was hurt, and Merritt fixed him up fine. I reckon he broke his arm trying to hustle and get under shelter!"

"Wait here for me, boys," Rob said; "if Lopez won't show up I'll have to hunt for him, because it's important to do something right away, or they'll be taken by surprise after all."

"Sort of like I've heard my dad tell: 'If the mountain won't come to Mohammed, why Mohammed must go to the mountain.' Well, come right back again, Rob, when you get through talking with Lopez, because we want to know some things."

Rob soon found the guide in the crowd. Lopez was doing his share of shouting and hand-shaking, and even the women and children were taking part in the demonstration. It amused the boy about as much as anything he had ever seen.

"They're a queer lot," he told himself, suppressing a grin as he came up to the guide; "you'd

think they'd done something real wonderful, now, instead of chasing up that rise and scaring off three skulkers who didn't want to fight at all. But then, I kind of think, these fellows can do considerable scrapping when once they get down to it. And they may have to yet, unless all signs fail before help comes."

Lopez, seeing his employer beckoning, quickly joined him.

"We ought not to be loafing the minutes away like this, Lopez," Rob began. "From what I saw when I was up there, chances are we'll have a shower of bullets dropping down on us from both sides before long. And think what that will mean when the women and children and unarmed travelers can't depend on the cars to hide them!"

Even Lopez seemed to be suitably impressed by the gravity of the conditions.

"The young señor has a plan? Let him tell it, and I will surely inform the brave captain of the valiant defenders of the train," he hastened to say.

Lopez had been studying Rob all the time that they had been in company, and evidently by now he had come to the conclusion that the boy was equal to any emergency. Plans seemed to be as

easy for him to originate as for Lopez to roll a cigarette with his nimble fingers.

"Yes, I happened to notice a spot close to the foot of the hill as I was coming down that would afford shelter not only for the women and children, but for our horses as well. Some of the rebels have animals, too, and the Federals have been mean enough to shoot at them. Two lie out there now, done to death. Let the captain know about this so that he may order everybody who is not a fighter to get under cover in this sunken spot among the rocks right away. Minutes may count with us, Lopez."

"Si, señor, right away will I do the same," replied the willing guide, hurrying to the side of the captain. He must have explained the situation to the commander of the rebels in few words, because presently several men advanced toward Rob, Lopez and the leader among them.

"He has sent word to everybody to follow," explained the guide, as they came up, "and asks that you lead the way to the fort, señor."

So Rob beckoned to the other three scouts, and upon their coming up, he directed:

"Bring the five horses, boys; we're going to hide the lot with the women and kids in a rocky

retreat close by, where they'll be safe from flying lead."

"That's a hunky idea!" declared Andy. "I was just bothering my head trying to think what we could do to protect our mounts; because, seeing how the cowardly Federals aimed to cut down the horses when they couldn't hit a man, made me reckon we might have to continue our journey afoot. We'll be right along after you, Rob. I'll see to your nag, and Merritt will take care of the guide's broncho."

Meanwhile, some of the rebels had made the crowd understand that they must leave the train for a brief time, because it would soon be as much as their lives were worth to remain out in the open. Once the enemy started shooting from both sides, the chances of being struck were bound to be tenfold as great as when they could hide behind the cars and use them as a fortress.

Some of the fugitives showed considerable concern about even temporarily abandoning the train; they acted as though they had treasures of some sort hidden in the luggage that was stored inside the cars. But the rebels would not stand for any delay or quibbling; and as a consequence the entire party, numbering almost a hundred,

took up a line of march after Rob and the advance guard, heading directly toward the nearby foot of the rise.

Trailing in and out among the large rocks that lay around near the base, the young scout master led the way to the protected "sink" where the fugitives from Chihuahua could find shelter while the coming battle raged.

A couple of minutes later the three boys came up with all the horses belonging to Rob's party. Others among the rebels, understanding what was going on and able to take a hint, made haste to fetch the rest of the animals; for there was plenty of room in the sink to afford a shelter for all.

"Say, this wouldn't make a bad sort of fort, would it?" Tubby remarked, as he glanced around at the rock walls that arose on nearly every side. "Now, tell me, Rob, why shouldn't the whole outfit stay in here, instead of sticking to the open and dodging bullets around that old train?"

"Why, don't you see," replied the other, always willing to oblige a comrade, "if the fighting men stayed here they could never tell where the enemy was located; and the consequence would be that the Regulars could drop down here and pro-

ceed to pour a hot fire right in among the bunch. No, that would never do, and the rebel captain knows it, too. Back to the train for us, boys. There we'll be in a position to see whatever fighting happens along."

"And what is our share of the row going to be, Rob?" asked Andy anxiously.

"Oh! don't bother about that—yet!" said Rob quietly. "If there happens to be a lot of men struck, why we'll show them how scouts learn to bandage wounds and render first aid to the injured. I'd do that for a Federal just as quick as for a rebel, because we're supposed to be neutrals in this Mexican mix-up, you understand. So we'll try and imagine ourselves Red Cross workers for the time being."

"Well, the fun's going to begin right away, I reckon!" Andy called out, as there came the sharp crack of a gun from up on the side of the hill which, before this, had been entirely free from the enemy.

"Whee! Hear that bullet let out a yell as it jumped by over our heads, did you?" gasped Tubby, trying to make himself as small as possible and not meeting with very much success, for rea-

sons that all of his chums could easily understand.

There was an immediate scurrying around of the rebels, each man trying to find some place where he could be safe from the rain of lead that would soon be falling.

A number stuck to the cars, believing they could manage to lie low and escape damage; while others, like the four boys, preferred to trust to the outlying rocks that in places offered little harbors of refuge.

In five minutes there was quite an exchange of shots going on, so that things began to seem "pretty lively," as Andy called it.

Acting on the advice of Rob, all of them had spread out what linen bandages they carried in their packs, as well as other things calculated to be of use in case of wounds.

"If I had dreamed that we should have to play the part of field hospital," Rob remarked, "I would have made sure to bring an extra supply along. But in case we run short of bandages, why there's that big night-shirt Tubby fetched, under the foolish impression he was going to sleep like he does at home. And when that's

gone we'll begin on his day shirt. Like enough it will fill the bill!"

Tubby hardly knew whether to take this in the light of a joke or not.

"Now, I don't mind giving up the useless sack in my pack, because several times I've been tempted to throw it away before some of you fellers began to josh me about it; but I do draw the line about handing over my spotted flannel shirt that I'm wearing right now to be torn into bandages, and wrapped about the arms of these dirty—er, I mean, brave señors who are fighting so hard."

"Here comes a fellow who's got his dose, I guess, Rob," said Merritt, as one of the rebels staggered toward their little enclosure, holding his left arm rigidly with the clenched fingers of his right hand and trying to suppress a look of pain on his swarthy face.

The Federals attempted to add to his troubles by shooting at him, so that the dust arose in several little spurts around his feet as he came on; but luckily he was not struck again, and soon sank down with a groan at the feet of the "gringo" boys, who had let it be known that they were ready to treat any and all wounds.

Rob immediately took the man in hand. He

had several pails of water handy, and was thus enabled to wash the fellow's arm first of all. It turned out that he had received a pretty serious hurt. It made Tubby shudder, but the fat scout showed plenty of grit, for he volunteered to assist Rob in any way possible.

Between them the wound was so well taken care of that when the bandage had been fastened the man declared in broken English that he was grateful, and would now dodge back to where he had dropped his gun, hoping to repay some venturesome Regular for his injury.

"There, I reckoned they had plenty of pluck once they got started!" Rob declared, on seeing the man run across the open space, jumping in a zigzag fashion when the lead began to patter around him.

Another came crawling into the hospital, having also been touched; and before he could be discharged a third bounded toward them, now stopping to limp, as though he hardly knew where he was hurt.

"This is going some, let me tell you!" said Merritt.

"Good practice for us scouts, all the same," Tubby declared, puffing out his big chest with a

suspicion of pride, and then as quickly subsiding when he heard a bullet spatter on the rock not three feet away, so that particles of stone even tingled his cheek.

For some time the battle at the stalled train continued, until hundreds of shots had been fired on either side and some seven or more rebels had been ministered to by the young field surgeons. But so far as the boys knew, there had thus far been no fatalities, at least on their side. Though no one could say whether or not any of the Federals up there among the rocks on the slope had been struck by the bullets the rebels continued to send aloft so industriously.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WHEN VILLA CAME.

"Seems to me they are dropping down closer and closer all the time. How about that, Rob?" questioned Andy presently, as a new burst of shots rang out.

"They are closing in some, for a fact," admitted the scout master, who had been well aware of this condition right along, though up to now he had kept it to himself, waiting to ascertain whether any one of his comrades would notice it.

"Hasn't the time come yet, Rob?" pleaded Andy.

"For what?" asked the other, although he could easily guess what Andy meant by the way he handled his rifle and looked anxiously up the slope to where those little jets of smoke accompanied each shot on the part of the advancing Federals.

"To let us have a hand in the mix-up," Andy continued. "You as much as said that if things got down to hard pan we'd just *have* to help the

rebels. They're our best friends, and you reckoned the others would treat us mean if they made us prisoners of war,—p'raps stand us up against a rock and wind us up, like they're so fond of doing with lots of prisoners down in this heathen country. Please say 'yes,' Rob. I'm not a sharpshooter, p'raps, but I just know I could chip off a shoulder strap from the uniform of that officer trying to hide behind that stump up there. Let me make him jump, won't you, Rob?"

But the other shook his head in the negative.

"Not yet, Andy, so lay your gun down again," he said, at which the other grumbled not a little.

"You said you'd let us if we got close to the last ditch, Rob," he remarked complainingly; "and seems like we might be close on that line now."

"You may think so," said Rob, with a reassuring smile; "but that's the time you shoot wild, Andy. Our prospects were never so bright as they are right now."

Even Merritt and Tubby showed that they were surprised to hear Rob speak in so positive a way, when it was plainly to be seen that the men on the hillside were becoming bolder, and apparently getting ready to rush the defenses

of the rebel force a little later, after they had covered more ground.

"Show your hand, Rob," said Merritt; "you're holding something out of sight, or you wouldn't talk like that. I know your ways; what's doing?"

"Listen, and you'll hear the rebels cheering right now!" said Rob.

"Yes, that's so," Andy replied; "but then they're ready to yell if anything happens. When that Federal lost his hold and fell about five feet, scrambling around like a squirrel that had missed its jump from one limb to another, they whooped it up till you'd thought the fight was won! What are they cheering for now, Rob?"

"Lopez has told the captain, as I made him promise to, when things began to look kind of gloomy all along the line; and they're passing it on," Rob observed.

"Yes, that's all very fine, but passing what along?" demanded Andy.

"Now that the cheering has let up for a few seconds, and the Federals have stopped firing to puzzle out what the row means, suppose you boys trim your ears, and see if you don't get some sort of sound that surprises you!"

"Great Cæsar! that rumbling must mean a

train somewhere, Rob!" ejaculated Merritt excitedly; while Andy chimed in:

"Does it, Rob? And did you glimpse it coming when you were away up yonder on the peak of the rocks?"

"Yes," replied the scout master with a laugh, "through my glasses, away off toward the south. And, boys, that train is just loaded down with rebel soldiers coming up from Chihuahua to get after the raiding parties of Federals that have been burning bridges and destroying railroad stock on the Mexican Central here!"

"And you didn't whisper a word of it to us, Rob, all this while?" cried Tubby, with a reproachful look on his beaming face.

"Why, you see, I didn't want any one to have false hopes," Rob told him. "How could I tell whether that train would get here in a week? The track might be all torn up on the other side of the burnt bridge. But I fixed it with Lopez that he was to tell the captain when he saw me wave my red bandanna handkerchief over this rock; and you saw me do that a few minutes ago."

"When you first caught the rumble of the train,

and knew it must be drawing near on the south side of the river?" interjected Merritt.

"That's what happened," Rob replied.

"But see here," Tubby insisted, "how are they going to help us if that same train can't cross on the steel girders of the burned bridge? You don't reckon it can do that, do you, Rob?"

"Certainly not, Tubby," replied the other, "but that isn't going to keep the men from getting over. You'll find some of them crossing like cats on the remains of the bridge. Others may wade the river, which doesn't appear to be very deep from what I saw of it."

"Yes, I noticed that you walked up that way and took observations, while the rest of us were watching the bridge burn," said Tubby. "And right then chances were you figured it all out in your mind how a feller might wade across if he had to! There never was such a chap to lay out plans ahead of time. No wonder you're always ready to act when things happen in a hurry!"

Rob simply touched the badge that was fastened to his left sleeve at the shoulder. Its position showed that he was filling the part of assistant scout master; and the fact that it was

complete, told that the wearer must be a first class scout. Then he repeated the words emblazoned on the badge:

"Be prepared!"

Merritt made a discovery about this time, which he announced in tones of delight.

"Looky there, boys! The enemy is in full flight, believe me! You can see them skipping out everywhere. Guess they've glimpsed the train coming along, and know that they'll soon be outnumbered five to one. And it's going to take them some little time to reach the place where they've left their mounts; so good-bye to you, Mr. Huerta's crowd!"

In a short time it was considered safe to show one's head above the rocks, and presently some of the rebels were running back toward the remains of the bridge, shouting at the top of their lungs with joy.

"There's the train!" cried Merritt, as he stood on the rock behind which he and his three chums had established the Red Cross field hospital, and done such effective work among the wounded.

Tubby gave several loud cheers; in fact, every one was calling out now, even the fugitives in the sink, some of whom appeared in view, hurry-

ing back to the cars, possibly to stand by their precious luggage and keep inquisitive hands from opening the packages.

The long troop-train came to a stand close to the other side of the river. Immediately a swarm of dark-faced men dropped from the heavily laden cars, and there was a concerted rush in the direction of the smoking bridge.

Just as Rob had said, many of the more daring, finding that the steel work had cooled to some degree, started to make their way across like monkeys, just as though they had lingering hopes of being able to come to hand-grips with the Regulars who had set fire to the railroad property. Others began to ford the stream, the water hardly coming up more than to their waists, as the dry season was on at the time.

"Well, I'm glad that it's all over and none of us got so much as a scratch!" Tubby was saying, while with his comrades he watched the swarm of men crossing the river.

"Yes, but I feel bad because I never got a chance to bang away even once," Andy grumbled, as, with gun tucked under his arm, he leaned dejectedly against the end car, and took in all the bustling sights.

"It's just as well," Rob told him. "If you knew right now that you had made one of those men go limping off to suffer all sorts of pain, because you felt that you just *had* to use your gun, when it wasn't your fight at all, do you think you'd feel any better because of it, Andy?"

Andy never said another word; but evidently Rob had set him to considering the conditions, and he saw things in a different light.

"They've got some horses aboard that car away back," Merritt announced. "See, they are getting them out! Look at that man giving orders, Rob. Seems like everybody just hustles whenever he says a single word. I reckon he must be somebody away up!"

"Mebbe General Villa himself!" suggested Tubby exultantly.

"I'm hoping it may turn out that way," Rob remarked, trying to appear calm, although himself more or less excited. "But whoever it is, he must have given orders for a pursuit, because you notice that as fast as the men get on this side they join some of our friends here, and go hurrying off. It must be that they hope to waylay the Federals before they can reach their horses and gallop away."

A short time later they began to hear regular volleys from the quarter whence these squads of eager-eyed men had gone, which would plainly indicate that they had been successful in intercepting the enemy, so that something like a fight was going on. Their shots must have bowled over some of the cavalrymen's mounts, for several prisoners were brought back to the train, wearing the dirty white uniforms of the Mexican soldiers and looking as though they expected a short shrift, with a firing squad to follow.

Meanwhile, the boys had been intensely interested in watching the figure of the mounted man who seemed to be a born leader. He directed all that was done, and appeared capable even of starting the rebuilding of the bridge after some fashion, so as to allow the passage of troop trains.

"Yes," Rob was telling himself, as he kept his eyes focused on the figure of this man, using his glasses meanwhile to aid his vision, "I really and truly believe that must be General Villa himself! I've heard him described, and this man seems to fill the bill."

Each of the other scouts must needs have a look through the wonderful lenses; after which,

Rob called to Lopez, who chanced to be passing.

"Is that General Villa?" the scout asked.

"None other, young señor," the guide replied.

Whereupon Tubby threw his hat several times high into the air, and said "Bully, bully, and again bully!" until he quite lost his breath, and had to rest.

"There, he's made up his mind to cross the river and see how the land lies on this side," remarked Merritt a little later on.

So the four tried and true comrades stood there waiting, feeling more than a little curiosity as they watched the remarkable man, whose name had been before the public so much of late, ride down to the ford, push his horse into the water, let him take a drink, and finally urge him across.

As he came up the near bank Rob, accompanied by his three chums, advanced to meet him, each boy giving the scout salute gravely and then standing at attention. Lopez hovered near, ready to render assistance in case there was any need of an interpreter, which could hardly be, as Villa was known to talk English fluently.

Tubby was fairly holding his breath with anx-

iety, for the fateful moment was now at hand when he would learn whether the former bandit, Villa, now chief in command of the rebel forces operating in Chihuahua, would remember the debt of gratitude he owed Doctor Mark Matthews.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A MAN OF HIS WORD.

"Is this General Villa?" Rob asked.

The man on the horse gave the scouts a scrutinizing look, and then frowned. Possibly he recognized the khaki uniforms that he had become accustomed to seeing United States regulars wear; and thus discovering them far down on the sacred soil of Mexico, he was angered more or less.

When Rob saw that frown he began to fear that he and his chums might not have as smooth sailing as they had anticipated, unless something were done immediately to interest the general in their favor.

Accordingly Rob's next move was to hold up his hand, on a finger of which he had made sure to slip that queer-looking ring which Uncle Mark had seemed to believe possessed all the magic powers attributed to like rings in fairy stories.

Sure enough, no sooner had the quick glance

of the general fallen on the ring than he started and looked at it more closely. Then, as an expression of intense interest flashed across his dark face, he beckoned to the scouts to draw nearer.

"Where did you get that ring, boy?" he demanded. "And who are you?"

"We belong to the Boy Scout organization, General," replied Rob soberly; "and have come several thousand miles just to meet you and show you this ring. You once put it on the finger of the man who saved your life, telling him that you would stand ready to do what you could for the one who presented it to you. That man was Dr. Mark Matthews, and this boy, here, is his nephew. Dr. Mark has recently got back from more than a year in Africa, where he was taken down with the terrible jungle fever, and is in a very bad way at the home of my friend, here. He has nothing left of his once large fortune except the property in Chihuahua—his cattle ranch, and the prize stock on it. And, General, he begs you to do what you can to dispose of the cattle, and send him the money by us. I have a letter in my coat that will explain all to you when you have more time to read it. But we only

wanted to let you know that we hadn't come into Mexico to mix up in the war that is going on here. And your captain will tell you that all we did was to take care of his wounded as fast as they were hurt."

"Yes, I have already heard that Americans who were on the ground had done that; but little did I expect to learn that they were boys," the general went on to say, as he looked still more keenly at them. But Rob noticed that the scowl had now disappeared entirely from his strong features. That ring had doubtless aroused memories of the days when he was a hunted man with a price on his head, and of Dr. Mark Matthews, who had sheltered him while attending to his severe wounds.

"Do you think there is any chance of Dr. Matthews getting paid for his cattle, General?" asked Tubby, emboldened to chime in by the fact that it was a family affair.

Something like a look of pride and deep satisfaction appeared on the rebel leader's face, as he answered this question.

"Why not, when for months I have had armed guards watching the ranch, so that none of the stock could be stolen? But it could not last,

and even to-day I was considering making use of the herds for my army, and settling with the owner when he came to put in a claim. Make yourselves at home with my men, for depend on it, you have not come all this way to have Pancho Villa redeem his sacred promise without reward. I am too busy now to speak further; but later on be sure to hand me the letter from my old and true friend, Dr. Matthews."

He urged his horse on and left the four scouts staring hard at each other with happy grins stealing over their faces.

"Looks mighty good to me!" commented Andy.

"Greatest thing that ever came down the pike!" exclaimed the delighted Tubby. And if a face that looked as beaming as a full moon might be taken as any indication of how the fat scout felt, he was certainly happy.

"It seems now as if we might go back with something to show for all our work, that's a fact," Merritt added.

"He did as much as say that he meant to take the cattle himself so as to feed his army and that he'd see you got good pay for them, all right, Tubby," Rob observed. "So it looks as though luck might be camping on our trail."

"And then, just think of all we've seen on this trip," added Andy. "A real battle on Mexican soil, with eight or ten rebels needing the assistance of the Boy Scout field hospital to keep them from bleeding to death! Am I sorry I came? Well, don't you believe it! Though I did want to take just a single crack at some of those crawlers up on the mountain, only Rob wouldn't hear of it!"

"Yes," Tubby said, with a sigh that seemed to well up from the very bottom of his heart, "I'll be pleased when this ride is over; because—well, I've got good reasons for thinking I'll be happier at home again. Fact is, I'm all hooped up a-straddling that big plug you got for me, Rob. Makes me think of the bow-legged floor walker who waddled up to a lady entering the store, and said: 'Silks? Certainly, madam; walk this way, please,' and then ambled off. They say she nearly fainted, and complained to the management that she had been insulted. I expect to 'walk that way' for some time yet, till I get my proper shape back again."

"Oh! you'll be able to take it easy after this, Tubby," Merritt assured him.

"Yes," Rob added, "chances are that we'll be

able to ride with General Villa all the way back to Juarez, where he seems to be bound right now. If they manage to get the engine of this train working again you might ride aboard if you don't feel like keeping to the saddle with the rest of us, Tubby."

"Didn't you notice that when he said so pompously that he'd pay for the cattle of his good friend Dr. Matthews, he slapped the side of his coat, as though he might have a pocket chuck full of greenbacks?" Tubby asked them.

"That's right, he did," assented Andy; "but let me warn you, brother, if it turns out to be rebel currency, don't you take it. And I'd likewise fight shy of real Mexican paper money; because if the other side wins, it won't be worth the paper it's printed on. Make him shell out in American cash or English coin stuff, but no pesos, Tubby."

"I'll be smart enough for that, and don't you forget it, Andy; thanking you for the tip all the same," the fat scout replied, nodding his head with the air of a shrewd business man who is about to make a big bargain, and does not mean to be over-reached by sharp practice.

The boys readily saw that Villa was what

Andy called a "hustler," for he soon had men busy examining the engine of the stalled train; and from the way in which they went to work it became evident that they must be mechanics accustomed to machinery.

"What's the good word, Lopez?" Andy called out, as the Mexican guide was hurrying past, possibly on an errand for the general, whom he appeared proud to serve. "Is there any chance that the old heap of junk that stands for an engine on this road these days will ever puff again and pull a train?"

"Si, señor, and before many hours have passed at that," came the reassuring reply, accompanied with a smirk and a shrug of the shoulders. "General Villa he has brought order out of chaos, and these wretched people who are heading for Juarez may soon be on their way. Most of them have already paid a heavy tribute to the rebel commanders for the privilege of leaving Chihuahua, and they have just been shouting bravos because the General assured them all would soon be well."

"He's a smart, wide-awake man, all right," asserted Tubby, who of course felt drawn toward the rebel chieftain. Had not General Villa

called them *"amigos,"* and was he not already pledged to purchase the herds of Uncle Mark's abandoned cattle ranch in Chihuahua State at the fairest possible price?

"Now I understand why some of these people hated to leave the cars, even when told that it was dangerous to stay," said Rob. "They are fleeing across to Texas, and carrying a lot of valuables with them, meaning to keep out of Mexico as long as the rival factions are fighting and destroying property everywhere. When the Federals find any one whose sympathies are with the other side they run off his stock, seize him, and make him pay all the tribute possible in order to spare his life. On the other hand, the rebels do just the same thing with all the wealthy people of Chihuahua who are believed to be for Huerta and his government. Why, they say that the Terrazas family own half the State, mines, ranches and all! But Villa has seized the whole thing, and will sell to any buyer. I heard it said an American syndicate had already offered him six million dollars for the lot; which was taking big chances of the success of this uprising."

"Perhaps that is where he is getting the money

he expects to pay Uncle Mark," suggested Tubby. "If it is in American bills, I'll believe so, too."

"Oh, they're taking in stacks and stacks of money, I heard one man say up in El Paso," Merritt remarked. "Ever since the rebels have come into possession of Chihuahua City they have squeezed the rich, taken possession of all kinds of paying businesses, like banks, laundries and groceries, started working the mines and getting the crude gold and silver to make into bullion; and altogether milked the cow like good fellows. They use this money to pay their soldiers, buy arms and get them across on the sly, and ditto ammunition. If our Government ever lets the rebels buy openly, there'll be big business along the Rio Grande, because they're taking in plenty of hard cash."

"But what d'ye reckon they'll do with that miserable lot of prisoners coming this way now, in charge of guards?" Andy asked. All of them glanced with a feeling akin to pity at the four men who, with drooping heads, were marching past, half a dozen armed rebels accompanying them.

"Well, there's so much bitterness shown between the Federals and the rebels nowadays,"

Rob said, "that I wouldn't be a bit surprised if they stood each one of those poor fellows up against a rock and gave him a volley! It costs money to feed prisoners, and what's the use bothering? That seems to be the motto of these men, who are not brought up to civilized methods of fighting. Anyhow, I'd hate to stand in the shoes of any one of that bunch, let me tell you."

"They seem to know just what's going to happen to them pretty soon," continued Andy. "You can see how they hang their heads and walk along as if they didn't care a snap whether school kept or not. I guess you hit the nail right on the head when you said what you did, Rob! Perhaps they're on the way to execution now!"

"Whew!" gasped Tubby, a look of pity crossing his good-natured face, "if that's so I mean to stick my fingers in my ears so I won't hear the volley. Why, it would be sure to haunt me all the years of my happy natural life. Poor fellers! I'd like to put in a word for the lot with Villa; but I'm afraid he wouldn't stand for our meddling with his business; and it might queer my other game, too, which I'd hate to have broken up."

"Hello! what does this mean, boys?" suddenly exclaimed Andy.

One of the four dejected-looking prisoners, at sound of the boys' voices, had raised his head. They had a glimpse of a dirty face and streaming hair. Even as they stared, this fellow broke out of the line, sprang forward toward the four Boy Scouts, and throwing himself down on his knees in front of them, clasped his hands convulsively together, as he almost shrieked:

"Save me, Rob Blake. Oh! don't let them shoot me! I'll promise anything if only you get me off with your friend, General Villa! Oh! Rob, help me, please!"

CHAPTER XXV.

AGAIN UNDER THE FOLDS OF "OLD GLORY."

The four boys were so utterly astonished when this Mexican soldier made his appeal in excellent English, calling Rob directly by name, that they could hardly catch their breath for the moment.

"Oh! don't you know me—Merritt, Andy, Tubby,—your old schoolmate, Jared Applegate? For the sake of the good old days save me from being shot by these human wolves! I've got an old father and mother up home in Hampton, you know! Think what a shock it would be to them to hear what had happened to their boy. Save me, Rob! You can do it, because I heard General Villa promise you anything you asked!"

The four scouts recognized him now, though never more taken aback in all their lives. When last they saw this young fellow, who had indeed lived near Hampton,—his father being a crabbed old farmer who hated the very name of Boy Scouts,—Jared had been hand-in-glove with some foreign plotters who meant to blow up the

locks of the gigantic Panama Canal. As narrated in the preceding volume, Rob and his intimate chums were largely instrumental in preventing this terrible crime from being carried out; and at that time young Jared had managed to escape, while the chief conspirators were captured.

Indeed, the scouts had forgotten that there had been such a fellow as Jared Applegate in the wide world; and now to have him turn up unexpectedly like this, with a frantic appeal for them to save his life on account of those old schoolboy days, was certainly staggering.

They turned and looked at each other, while the guard who had followed after the prisoner-of-war waited to see what would happen, seeming to realize that this fellow must know the American lads who were so high in the good graces of the commander.

"It is Jared, as sure as shooting!" ejaculated Tubby, staring as though he had just seen a ghost.

"They say bad pennies always turn up again," observed Andy; "and I reckon Jared is about as tough a case as you could find."

Rob and Merritt did not say anything along

those lines. They could not add to the burden under which it was plain the wretched youth was already staggering. And so Jared continued to wring his hands, kneeling there and waiting to hear the scout master, whom he knew so well, say whether he would lift his hand to help him, or simply turn aside and let things take their course.

"But how does it come that we find you here, and wearing the uniform of a Mexican Regular?" Rob asked him.

"The last we saw of you, remember, was on the Isthmus, where you played a low-down trick on us," Tubby interjected.

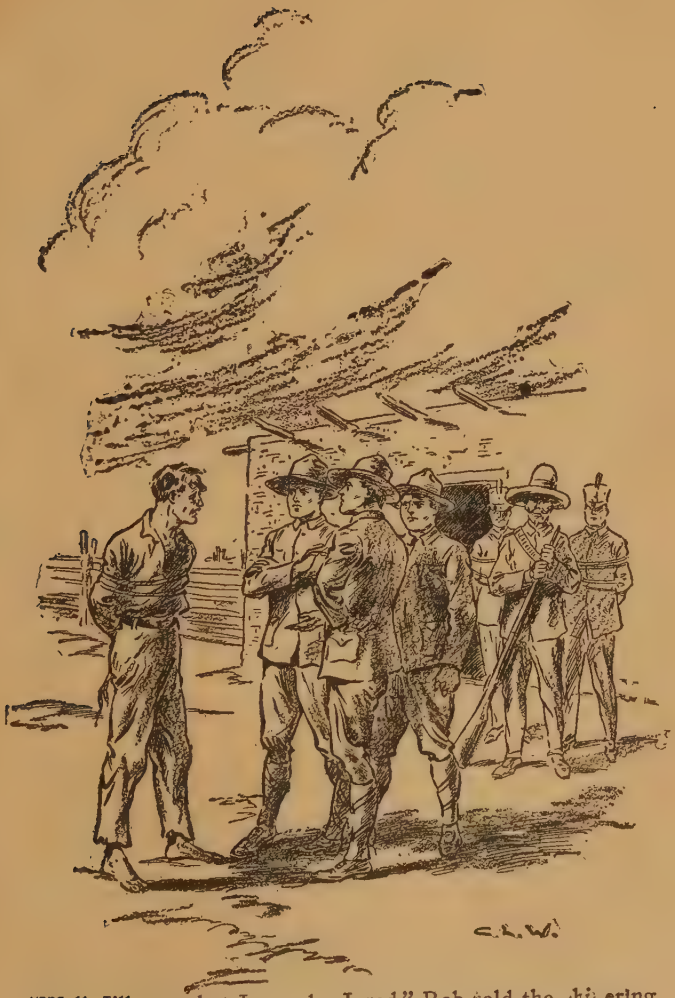
"Yes; and after I managed to get away from there I drifted to Mexico, because I was ashamed to go back home. I expected that you'd tell everybody what a fool I'd been, working with men who hated the United States and wanted to injure the Canal. Then I took the oath of allegiance to Mexico and entered the army because there wasn't anything else I could do. And now the rebels have captured me, they mean to stand me up against a wall and murder me! Oh! Rob, please get me off! You can do it if you will. It's up to you whether I'm killed or not! You

wouldn't care to think of that always, would you?"

"Well, I don't like you any too much, Jared, because of what you've done in the past," Rob said slowly; "and when you try to put the whole thing on my shoulders you're on the wrong tack, because I haven't had a single thing to do with it. But I can't forget that you *are* a Hampton boy, bad as you've always been. If I should manage to get General Villa to let you go, what would you do?"

"Get over the line the first thing," replied Jared promptly, showing that this must have been on his mind for some time. "I meant to desert any way, just as soon as I saw a chance to get clear. I've been treated like a dog down here, and hate the whole country as well as the dagoes in it. But, Rob, promise to help me, won't you? Here comes General Villa now to see what it all means. Tell him I'm not going to lift a hand against him again. I was forced into it this time."

"Well, I'll see what I can do, Jared," Rob told the shivering wretch; "but don't feel too sure that it'll come out as you wish. General Villa is very bitter toward all of the men serving under Huerta; and I chance to know he hates to find



"Well, I'll see what I can do, Jared," Rob told the shivering wretch.—*Page* 270.

a foreigner in the ranks of the Government troops."

As the fighting general of the revolutionists came up, Rob started in to tell him about Jared, and how he was from the same town away up on Long Island that the other boys called home. He did not whisper a word about what Jared had done in connection with that Canal conspiracy; for he seemed to know that such a thing would be apt to set Villa's mind against the young chap.

"Since you say that he is from your town," the general observed, after Rob had made his plea, "and was once a friend of yours, why, I will agree to let him go free on condition that he crosses the river to Texas without delay. Will you promise to see that this compact is carried out, young señor?"

There was nothing for Rob to do but agree, though he knew that this would mean he must stand the company of Jared until such time as they reached Juarez, and could cross to the other side of the Rio Grande. But he could not find it in his generous heart to abandon the wretched fellow, little as the other deserved mercy at his hands.

General Villa, before hurrying away, said a few words to the guard, who went back to the other prisoners and left Jared with the scouts. He began to pour out his thanks, having been in a state of abject terror; but Rob quickly put a stop to this.

"Words are cheap, Jared, you understand," he said, "and actions speak a great deal louder all the time. If you're really thankful for what we've done for you, show it by turning over a new leaf, and doing something that you'd be proud to have the home folks in old Hampton hear about."

"I mean to, Rob," whined the other boy; "this here has been a terrible lesson to me; and after this you don't catch me in any more games like I've been meddlin' with lately. Some day, mebbe, you'll hear about Jared Applegate doing a big thing. I'm a changed boy, I tell you, Rob, sure I am!"

But Rob felt that he "would have to be shown" before he could believe in any reformation on the part of Jared Applegate. And more than that, he duly warned his three chums that under no circumstances should they let fall a hint regarding the true nature of their mission to Mexico while Jared was in their company. He hoped

the other had not guessed anything along those lines as yet; for Rob believed that if Jared knew they were carrying back a large sum of money, such as General Villa meant to hand over to Tubby in payment for his friend's cattle, it would be a great temptation to the weak boy, who might even plot to steal it while they slept.

The engine belonging to the stalled train was finally fixed, so that it could again draw the long line of cars. Being desirous of taking his men to Juarez as quickly as possible, on account of some *coup* he expected to make, Villa had most of them crowd aboard and on top of the train that was ready to start, some being left to engage in the work of rebuilding the burned bridge as soon as possible.

Before he left the scouts, General Villa had another interview with them.

"Fortunately," he told the boys, "I know just about the number of head of cattle there happens to be on Dr. Matthews' ranch right now, because my men have been on guard there to protect it against all danger. And I have figured it out that if I send him seventy-five thousand American dollars it will cover the bill. This I now take pleasure in handing over to you, as the

nephew of my old friend, the man who saved Pancho Villa's life. Sign this receipt, all of you, as the custodians of the fund, so that I may have something to show. I shall sometimes think of you, boys, for you are after my own heart. I shall immediately send men to fetch my cattle to camp, so that my army may be fed. This money comes from honest sources, tell Dr. Matthews. It is the advance payment made by an American company for some of the property held by traitors to the cause in Chihuahua, and which they can never own again while Villa or his cause lives. That is all, for I must be gone."

He shook hands with every one of the four boys, but drew the line at Jared, for whom he evidently felt only contempt and distrust. Whether it was an honor, or not, to press the hand of this rebel leader must always be an open question in the minds of the scouts, because they had heard many terrible stories about his cruelty, as well as others concerning his rare ability as a leader of men. But at least, it would be something to remember and to tell the other lads in Hampton when they reached home again.

Jared had not been close enough to overhear what was said at the time the package of bills

was turned over, and Tubby had been careful to secrete it at once; so they hoped that the wretched traitor to his country knew nothing about it.

When Tubby found a chance, he turned the packet over to Rob for safe keeping.

"I managed to count it, Rob, on the sly," he whispered; "and just as Villa said, there's a full seventy-five thousand dollars there in big bills. Just to think of us carrying a whole fortune around like that! But after you've sewed it in the lining of your coat, where that letter was, I guess there'll be no danger."

"More from Jared than anybody else," warned Rob; "so make sure not to drop a hint."

"Mum's the word," agreed Tubby with a set look on his face. "And say, I hope we take things easy going all the way to Juarez again. No need for hurrying, is there?"

"No, not anything that would worry us," Rob replied; "though I won't rest easy until we've handed this money over to a bank, and got a draft for it. And I'll see if I can fix you a more comfortable seat by using your blanket in four thicknesses. I managed to get a horse for Jared, so we'll be able to ride in company. We'll feed him and take him along to Juarez; but under no

circumstances must he be allowed to join in our talk."

Lopez again took charge of the expedition, and they headed north, satisfied with the result of their adventurous ride into Mexico. They carried a paper from Villa that would serve to pass them, should they come upon any detachment of roving rebels. If raiding Federals appeared, they would have to gallop for it, or fight them off.

But fortune was kind, and they finally arrived safely in the vicinity of Juarez. Their paper allowed them to cross the international bridge, which has been the scene of so many stirring events of late years; and every Boy Scout was thrilled to the heart when he once more realized that he stood on American soil and under the protecting folds of "Old Glory." They gathered around Rob and gave three cheers and a tiger for General Villa, toward whom, naturally enough, all of the boys were feeling warmly, because he had shown himself their good friend.

One of the first things Tubby did, after the money had been turned over to a bank, was to send a long message over the wire, directed to Uncle Mark, telling of their great good fortune,

and asking that the home folks of the other boys be informed of the fact that they were all well, and headed for home.

Jared Applegate was permitted to go, with a sum of money in his pocket and many protestations of gratitude on his lips, which the scouts "took with a grain of allowance," as the old saying is. Then they shook hands with faithful Lopez, whom they would always remember, and were ready to start on the long journey toward home.

CHAPTER XXVI.

ON TO WASHINGTON!

"Now, fellers," said Tubby, drawing a long sigh as, business over, Rob pulled out a railroad guide, "the time has come to spring a surprise on you. I've nearly burst trying to keep it a secret."

Tubby sighed again and took another "Mexican kiss" from the candy box in his hand.

"Have one, Andy? Help yourself, Merritt. Just hold this box a minute, Rob," he continued indistinctly as his heavy jaws met on the sticky, nutty mouthful.

"No more for me, thank you," replied Andy with a little gesture of refusal. "Just about one makes a satisfactory between-meal, in my opinion."

"None for me," rejoined Merritt, also. "I have barely succeeded in washing off the sticky traces of my last 'kiss.'"

"But what is the surprise, Tubby?" demanded Rob, keeping his finger in the folded time table as he accommodatingly held the box.

"Come over to this bench in the shade," directed Tubby importantly, "and I will unveil the mystery!"

The boys winked amusedly at one another as they followed Tubby. They expected nothing more serious than a joke, and Rob was a little impatient at the interruption.

"I couldn't tell you at first," Tubby went on, sinking upon the seat as the boys reached it, "because Uncle Mark told me to say nothing until we were ready to leave Mexico. And then I didn't dare share the news so long as Jared was around. But now——"

Tubby paused dramatically, and drew out of an inner pocket a sealed envelope that bulged invitingly. This he turned over several times, apparently in an absent manner, and then looked up to see how the boys were taking it.

"What in the world——" began Andy wonderingly.

"Out with it, Tubby!" cried Rob. "I'm in a hurry to look up the first train that leaves here, going our way."

"You needn't hurry," replied Tubby deliberately. "We shall not leave until the evening train for the north."

"Come, Tubby," urged Merritt, "what is up your sleeve?"

"Oh, it is in my hand now," said Tubby teasingly. "Now listen, fellers! When Uncle Mark bought our tickets, he secured them through a friend who is in a big touring agency, you know. Instead of buying straight-through, round-trip tickets, he got the return set with stop-over privileges, and had a little private itinerary arranged for us.

"We leave El Paso to-night and have an hour or two in Albuquerque to-morrow morning, before we take the train east. Beyond that, I know no more than the rest of you,—but here goes!"

With a quick motion, Tubby tore open the sealed envelope and took out four long combination tickets, and a typewritten list of directions.

"Here, Rob, you read them to us," he said, handing over the paper.

"This gives us stop-overs at Albuquerque, St. Louis and Washington," remarked Rob, glancing hastily at the items. "Each stop is for less than a day, and we travel every night. Hurray for Uncle Mark!"

"And a tiger!" added Andy enthusiastically.

"And many *bravos,*" supplemented Merritt, his

eyes shining at the prospect. "I have always wanted to visit Washington, but, with all our travels, we have managed to skip straight to our destinations without stopping anywhere."

"At this rate," commented Andy, "it will take us a good deal longer to get home!"

"Even so," agreed Tubby. "But who is in a hurry now? Give them time to finish their repairs on the old Academy, Andy."

That evening, as arranged, the four boys took the train from El Paso. As they sat on the observation platform for an hour before turning in, Rob remarked:

"Do you realize that we have been in the largest state in the Union,—Texas? I can't appreciate it, for we have seen such a little portion of the northwest corner. They say that El Paso, high and dry, is the most isolated of the larger cities, and that irrigation has done much to increase its products and its population."

"I was surprised to learn that it is an important station on at least five big railway lines," added Merritt.

"But we have used the city in its most particular capacity," interjected Tubby proudly. "You know it is called 'the doorway to Mexico'!"

"And I guess that we are not very sorry to be on this side of the door!" commented Andy with a nod of his head.

All that night the train rumbled northward, never departing far from the course of the Rio Grande, as if following it toward its source. And when the boys awoke they were approaching Albuquerque, New Mexico, where they were to breakfast and to spend some time before making their east-bound connections.

"Whoop-ee! Look at the gay buildings!" cried Tubby, thrusting his head out of the car window as the train slowed down. "Is that what you'd call modified adobe architecture?"

"You may wish to modify that statement later," remarked Merritt dryly, "so I will pull you in before you lose the top of your think-tank."

"All ready, boys?" called Rob briskly. "All out for breakfast!"

"Right here," replied Tubby promptly. "Hope we'll have a good one."

"We shall. The chain of restaurants along this line has a great reputation," Rob rejoined, smiling at Tubby's eagerness. "Got everything, Andy?"

The four boys and a few fellow passengers,

likewise eastward bound, alighted from the train as soon as it had stopped and took a bee-line for the dining-room, scarcely noticing their unique surroundings. But after even Tubby had pronounced his breakfast amply satisfying, the boys stepped outside with eyes and ears open for new impressions.

As they strolled along the broad, low piazza of the long Alvarado, Tubby peered through the arched sides toward the railroad.

"See the procession of Indians!" he ejaculated. "They are wearing all the clothes they own and carrying the rest of their worldly possessions on their heads!"

Andy laughed outright at this observation. "Did you ever see such clumsy legs?" he chuckled. "They are padded like a football player's."

"Worse!" commented Merritt, joining the discussion. "And those are women, too."

At that moment the line of approaching Indians broke into several groups.

Each woman squatted down on the edge of the sidewalk leading to the main entrance of the Indian Building, and spread about her the baskets and pottery which she had been carrying on her head.

The few Indian men who had sauntered on before the procession lounged nonchalantly against the arches near the doorway, gazing at their women in superior disdain.

As the boys approached, the men merely looked at them from under the black locks that straggled almost into their eyes; but the women rose clumsily to their feet, pulled their big plaid shawls more closely about their heads, and hastened to offer their wares.

"By the way, fellers," said Tubby quietly, turning to the other boys, "Uncle Mark said to tell you to pick up some souvenirs and he would foot the bill. In fact, he gave me another sealed envelope marked 'Incidentals,' and I found four ten-dollar bills in it when I opened it last night. So go ahead, and select some things for the home folks."

"Tubby, your uncle is certainly all right!" exclaimed Andy.

"Well, he is some grateful, you know," returned Tubby.

"We won't refuse such a chance," remarked Rob appreciatively, "and I see a basket right now that would look fine on my mother's sewing table."

"Let's go inside and look around first," suggested Merritt. "It looks like a museum in there."

For the next hour the boys were absorbed in the interesting things displayed in the various sections of the Indian Building.

"Jiminy," cried Andy, as he caught sight of a bark canoe suspended from the ceiling, "there is the genuine article, all right!"

"Doesn't that rug make you think of a cozy den at home, Rob?" added Merritt a moment later.

"It is the very thing that a fellow likes,—red and black with a white design," rejoined Rob. "And there's a little one with the swastika on it; just right to throw over the foot of the couch."

"What is the 'swastika'?" inquired Andy.

"Oh, it is a good-luck sign. If you look, you will find it in a great many rugs and blankets, and it is often woven into the baskets, too."

"I wonder if this zig-zag pattern means anything?" asked Tubby, pointing a chubby finger at a large rug that lay on the floor.

"I've heard that that stands for lightning," Rob answered. "You know all savage people have a great respect for the mysteries of nature."

"What do I hear?" exclaimed Andy, halting suddenly.

"It is a baby whimpering!" cried Tubby. "Of all things! There must be a papoose somewhere around!"

"Over here, boys," called Merritt, motioning toward the farther corner of the room. The boys hastened to follow him and found a little alcove, shut off by draped blankets and enclosed by a slender wooden gateway. Through the wide slats of this, they discovered an Indian woman kneeling on a fur rug and busily weaving a brilliant blanket on an upright loom. Just beyond the mother, a little dark-skinned girl was peeping shyly at them, one finger lost between her lips. And in the background, propped against a roll of blankets, was the wailing papoose, securely wrapped and bound upon a board-cradle in typical and traditional Indian fashion.

As the boys looked in at this picturesque exhibition of family life, a tall, lank Indian man sauntered up and muttered a few authoritative words to the woman at the loom. She stopped her work and went over to the child, trying to hush its cries by shaking a string of bright beads before it.

"Huh!" grunted Tubby, looking after the de-

parting man. "He only wanted us to see that he was 'big chief' here! Huh!"

When the east-bound train stopped at Albuquerque an hour later, each one of the boys had purchased a few small souvenirs. Rob had the tiny square rug of Navajo weaving that had caught his eye, a round, almost flat workbasket, and a little pair of bead-embroidered moccasins.

Merritt and Andy had selected a few inexpensive, gaudily decorated gourds and strings of beads for their boy friends. At the last moment, Tubby decided to burden himself with what he considered an artistic bit of pottery. Rob warned him that vases and jugs and urns were breakable, but Tubby persisted in bargaining for the piece that he had chosen.

"Two dolla'," the woman who held it said as he hesitated beside her.

"No, no. *One* dolla'," Tubby offered.

"One dolla'," the woman agreed; and then as Tubby extended his hand for the vase and gave her the money, the woman drew back and said frowningly, "No, no! *Two* dolla'!"

At this Tubby seized his purchase and rather inelegantly rejoined, "Not on your life!" as he made off for the car.

At St. Louis the boys were glad to break the long railway journey and to visit the places noted in the itinerary that Dr. Matthews had provided. This included an automobile ride about the city, which gave them an excellent idea of its arrangement, its fine system of parks and its public buildings. At the end of the ride they felt quite ready to follow the next suggestion, which directed them to a popular restaurant. And after luncheon they still had time to walk across the great bridge that spans the Mississippi and to return by ferry, before their train was due to depart for Washington.

They reached the National City early in the morning, and here, too, they were advised by their typewritten directions to save time by taking a sight-seeing automobile and sitting near the "personal conductor" of the car in order to view quickly the important sections of Washington.

Having engaged their seats, the four boys sat in the big machine and studied diligently the map of the city and the guide books that they had bought at the station, until the usual hour for the daily morning trip arrived. Then, eagerly interested, they gave their whole attention to the vistas that opened momentarily before them and to the

descriptions that interpreted the sights. They made many mental notes of places that they would like to see again: the Capitol, the Congressional Library, the Smithsonian Institute, the Washington Monument, the White House and a dozen other interesting buildings. But when the ride was over, they decided to accept the advice on the touring agent's list and spend most of their remaining time in the Capitol and Congressional Library.

"We'll engage a guide here," said Rob as they ran up the broad flight of steps leading to the western entrance of the Capitol. "I know that it is the customary thing to do, and it will save a lot of time, too."

Scarcely had they entered the Rotunda before a blue-uniformed attendant approached them and offered his services, and no time was lost in making a start.

The historical paintings gave the guide the text for his opening speech, and from then to the end of the trip the boys followed him closely and listened to his explanations with keen interest.

Coming so recently from scenes of civil strife, the scouts had a new respect for the torn and soiled battle flags that they saw, and for the sig-

nificant paintings that illustrated scenes of martial victory.

"I'll bet Cornwallis hated to give up," ejaculated Tubby thoughtfully, as he gazed at the picture of the surrender at Yorktown.

"We don't often think of his feelings when we remember our victory," responded Rob, "but it is just as well to know that there are two points of view for every crisis."

"This way, please," called the guide, and the boys hurried after him into the Statuary Hall.

While Tubby stood lost in contemplation before a statue of Daniel Webster, the guide led Andy quietly out of sight behind another marble figure.

"Now whisper a message to your friend," directed the guide softly.

"Hey, Tubby, how would you like to be the man on the pedestal?" whispered Andy, seeing that there was some joke in store for his fat chum.

Tubby whirled around quickly at the question, and looked vastly surprised not to find Andy at his elbow.

"Where are you?" he asked, bewildered.

Andy chuckled softly and, at a nod from the

smiling guide, whispered, "This side of the Rio Grande!"

"Where *is* Andy, fellers?" questioned Tubby, looking at Rob and Merritt. "Honest, his voice sounded right in my ear!"

At that Andy stepped into view, and the guide explained that the hall had the properties of a "whispering gallery," and that half his fun in life came through playing this simple trick on unsuspecting visitors.

"It is a good trick, all right," admitted Tubby, grinning, "and I won't hold it against you, Mr. Guide!"

From this room,—in Daniel Webster's day the Hall of Representatives,—the boys were led to the doors of the present legislative chambers and permitted brief views of the imposing desks, arranged in semi-circular rows, at which the men sent from all over the nation sit in long sessions of serious deliberation. On the day of the scouts' visit, Congress was not in session and there was nothing to prevent the boys from peopling the empty seats with men of their own imagination.

"Some day maybe you and Merritt will sit there," said Tubby to Rob.

"Why not you, Tubby?" asked Merritt quickly.

"Oh, me?" questioned the fat boy in alarm. "This is no place for me. Give me a good steady job that I can keep at till it's *finished*. Perhaps *I'll* join the Secret Service!" And Tubby patted the pocket where the odd shaving lay.

After lingering briefly in admiration before the paintings that adorned these rooms and the statues that punctuated the long corridors, the guide conducted the boys to the foot of the stairs that led to the lofty dome above the Rotunda.

"Better not hurry," he cautioned them, glancing at Tubby's bulk. "There are three hundred and nineteen steps between us and the top gallery."

"I'm game," said Tubby quickly. "Come on, fellers. It can't be so bad as horseback riding in Mexico!"

When about two-thirds of the way up, the guide halted the boys to demonstrate a second "whispering gallery," and there he placed Rob and Merritt sixty-five feet apart to enjoy a private conversation! Tubby refused to be convinced without a trial himself, so he and Andy tested the acoustic properties of the gallery until they were satisfied that the guide's claims were well founded.

When they reached the highest point available within the dome, Rob made a discovery.

"Boys, will you look at that mess of color over your heads? From 'way down below I thought that was a very beautiful painting!"

"And so it is," put in the guide.

"One of the kind where 'distance lends enchantment,'" commented Merritt, gazing at the thick patches of paint on the ceiling above them.

"That is quite right," said the guide. "This painting was put here to be seen from the floor of the Rotunda, and that is one hundred and eighty feet below."

"Jiminy," ejaculated Tubby, "our heads must look like mere specks to the people who are looking up here now!"

"And the people down there look like flies and ants scuttering around," added Andy with his usual chuckle, as he peered over the lofty railing.

On the way down, the attendant showed the boys a fine view from the dome, and pointed out many of the prominent buildings and towers that they had already passed in their morning's ride.

As they paid the excellent guide in thanks as well as coin and went out of the great eastern

portico, Tubby patted the front of his coat suggestively.

"Fellers, my feelings tell me that it is long past noon," he said.

Rob pulled out his watch.

"For once your feelings are to be trusted, Tubby. It is one o'clock. We'll get a hasty lunch nearby and try to visit both the Library and the Monument this afternoon."

An hour passed, however, before the boys were again free to go sight-seeing. In Washington, distances are deceptive and time flies.

"Well, which shall it be, boys?" asked Rob. "It is two o'clock, and we have two hours before we must start for the station."

"Let's make it the Monument," suggested Merritt.

"Agreed," said the others.

"And we'll ask this policeman the quickest way to get there," added Rob, jumping after a passing uniform.

The man pointed out a coming street car, gave them a few definite directions, and the boys were off once more.

At the Monument luck favored them again, for they were just in time to catch an ascending ele-

vator. In spite of all that they had seen, they were greatly surprised at the extent and the beauty of the view from the top of the tall shaft. It was fortunately a clear day and they could trace easily the glint of the broad Potomac for many miles.

"Time to be moving if we walk down," said Rob, after they had tried to locate everything visible in the panorama spread out before them.

"We must walk down," urged Merritt. "There is so much to see in the rare stones and relics set all the way down in the inside of the tower walls, —so I've been told."

"If we read all the inscriptions it will take too much time," warned Rob, "but we can spend half an hour more here."

At the end of that time the boys emerged from the lofty shaft with a feeling that they had been on a long journey. From all over the world had come the mementos that they had just seen,— from foreign battlegrounds, from fields of exploration, and from places of historic sentiment.

"That was as good as a lesson in 'Ancient and Modern History,'" claimed Tubby, reluctant to go.

"Yes, but now let's beat it to the station," Andy urged, "or we'll miss our train."

"Should you care if we missed it, boys?" asked Rob, stopping deliberately and facing them.

"What do you mean?" inquired Merritt.

"Just this: We have purposely refrained from giving our folks the exact date of our coming home, and this itinerary does not bind us to any definite train. Why not get a glimpse of the Smithsonian Institute, visit the Congressional Library this evening and take the midnight sleeper for New York? Then we can walk in at home soon after breakfast is over to-morrow morning and surprise everybody. What do you say?"

"We say 'Yes'!" chimed in the three other voices.

"It is a great idea," Merritt added. "They say that the Library is really wonderful at night."

And this was the program decided upon and carried out effectively. Tubby and Andy were perhaps more enthusiastic over the collections in the Institute than over the color decorations in the Library; but Rob and Merritt observed no lack of interest, their own pleasure in everything being so complete.

It was a tired quartette of scouts who tumbled

into their berths that night half an hour before the "owl train" pulled out of Washington, but not one of them thought of complaining of their weariness. They were more than satisfied at the delightful ending of their hasty flight to Mexico.

CHAPTER XXVII.

TUBBY SOLVES THE MYSTERY.

"Well, I've got some great news for you, fellers!" Tubby exclaimed as he came panting into Rob's den, where Andy and Merritt were comfortably coiled in easy chairs, about a week after they had returned home from their eventful trip down across the Rio Grande.

"Another accident happened to the poor old Academy, just when they've got the unlucky building fit for school! And perhaps a lovely journey for us, away across the continent this time to Sunny California!" suggested Andy, sitting up suddenly with a look of eagerness on his boyish face.

Tubby shook his head in the negative.

"You're no good at guessing, Andy; perhaps now, Rob, here, or our corporal, might hew closer to the line."

Rob had been looking at the excited, triumphant face of the fat chum. He remembered what a great fellow Tubby was to hang on to any-

thing, just like a bulldog might, and there flashed into his mind how he had once caught Tubby looking at a certain little object which he had carried carefully with him all the way to Mexico and back.

"You've struck something new about that boat business, that's what, Tubby!" he cried, pointing his finger at the other.

"Oh! say, that is hardly fair," grumbled Tubby. "I expected to have you all up in the air guessing; and here Rob goes and hits the facts the very first pop."

"Then you've made a discovery, is that it, Tubby?" asked Merritt.

"I should say I had, and in the most remarkable way ever heard of," the stout scout declared. "Talk about your luck—but then, if I hadn't been prepared and kept my eyes open, it wouldn't have happened, that's what. Yes, sir, it pays to have eyes in your head, and some gray matter in your brain, if I do say it myself that oughtn't. Remember that, Andy Bowles, and don't think you're doing your whole duty as a scout when you just blow that bugle of yours now and then."

"Oh! come, tell us what's happened, Tubby, and never mind about me," suggested Andy with

a broad grin. For it was like putting the cart before the horse to have clumsy, good-natured, but careless Tubby tell another boy how to prove himself worthy of bearing the name of scout.

"All right, I won't keep you wondering too long," Tubby continued, being in reality just wild to relate his story. "You all remember how, when I picked up that little curled shaving floating on the water that was in Rob's sailboat, and noticed how it had a queer raised ridge running all along, I said that the bit that had been used to bore that round hole must have a good-sized nick in each of the two cutting edges? Well, I was right; it has!"

"Then you prowled around, and poked into everybody's tool-chest till you found such a bit, did you?" demanded Andy.

"I meant to," admitted Tubby, "but so many things have kept coming up since our getting back from Mexico that it just seemed as though I couldn't make a start. But only this very morning I told myself I'd get busy, and see if I couldn't wipe that old mystery off the slate. Then that wonderful streak of good luck ran slap up against me, and I took advantage of my opportunity. Every true scout has to grab a golden

chance when it comes along, Andy; you know that?"

"Oh! go on, and quit your preaching," grunted the other scout.

"Well, I was walking along the main street of Hampton just half an hour ago, and all at once I happened to spy just such an object as I had in my mind right then. It was a carpenter's brace, and was carried under the arm of a man I immediately recognized as Jacob Ramsay."

"H'm! the father of that bad boy, Max Ramsay," exclaimed Merritt, with a wise nod of the head, as though he already knew what was coming.

"Of course," continued Tubby, "that interested me a heap, and I wondered why he was carrying a brace with him. Then he went into the hardware store. That made me think quick, and so I hurried after him. Just as I got inside, I heard him saying something to the dealer about his largest bit having been badly nicked some months ago when he was cutting into a heavy plank that had a lot of rusty nails in it, and that he wanted a duplicate; also, that he'd fetched the bit along so as to make sure the new one fitted."

"Fine, Tubby!" exclaimed Rob laughingly.

"You'd surely make a pretty good detective. Wouldn't he, fellows?"

"Well, I know that he's got a splendid detector for any kind of grub that is lying around," Andy declared; "but I never before thought he could follow up a clew that didn't have the odor of cooking about it."

"And here's the broken bit!" Tubby said triumphantly, as he drew something out of his pocket and held it up. "Mr. Ramsay got his new one, and never bothered taking the old bit off the counter, because it could never be fixed again. And I asked the hardware man if he cared to let me have it, which he said was all right. And now, Rob, here's that shaving I've been lugging around with me ever so long; just make a try, and see if that raised ridge fits the nicks in the cutting edges, will you?"

"Surely I will, Tubby," replied the scout master, reaching out his hand for the two articles, and all the others bent their heads closer to watch the result.

After Rob had made repeated trials it was manifest to everyone that they were positively looking on the identical bit used in boring that hole through the bottom of Rob's boat. The cir-

cumstantial evidence was as complete as any that ever sent a criminal to the gallows or the electric chair.

"Well, what d'ye say, Rob?" demanded the fat scout eagerly.

"Shake hands on it, Tubby," remarked Rob. "You've proved your case as clean as a whistle, hasn't he, boys?"

"No question about it," replied Merritt, also grasping the pudgy fist of Tubby and giving it a squeeze that made the tears come to the boy's eyes.

"Looks as though you'd hit on the right borer of holes," admitted Andy, "but now, what are you going to do about it, Tubby? The boat wasn't lost, so you couldn't have Max arrested, charged with malicious destruction of property. And I don't think you're contemplating giving him a licking for being so mean, because that isn't in your line very much—even if you weren't a scout and dassent!"

"I'll tell you what I thought," said Tubby. "Rob, your boat had the mischief done to it, not mine; I've only been the means of finding out who played that low-down trick on you that might have cost us dear. Suppose now you take this

bit and curl of shaving, and confront Max. Let him know you'll tell his father all about it unless he says he's sorry and promises never to try such a contemptible thing again. I reckon that is what a scout's duty would be in a case like this."

"And you're right about that, Tubby," said Rob, secretly pleased to see how seriously the other took the affair. "I'll accept the mission, with many thanks to you for finding out what you did. It was a clever job all around. Lots of fellows would have forgotten all about that shaving weeks ago, but you've been keeping it on your mind right along. I even saw you looking at it away down in Mexico, and I had a pretty good hunch you'd run that rascal down sooner or later."

Rob was as good as his word, and did astonish Max Ramsay one fine day by confronting him with the evidence of his rascality, to the utter consternation of the boy. Finding himself cornered, Max confessed that he had done the deed, but he stoutly declared that he had not dreamed that anything like danger would result. He knew that, if the water suddenly poured into the boat when the plug was dislodged, no harm would follow, because Rob could swim like a fish.

He professed to be sorry, but Rob fancied that this was assumed more in order to keep the other from informing his father, who was already angry because of his many pranks about town, than from any compunction that he felt.

All the same there was considerable satisfaction to Tubby, Rob and the other two scouts, because the mystery had been cleared up. It was noticeable in the future, however, that none of those fellows would ever go out sailing without first carefully inspecting the bottom of the boat, to make sure that it had not been tampered with.

Tubby still keeps that nicked bit, as well as the shaving and the plug that filled the hole in the bottom of the sailboat, to remind him of what happened that dull November afternoon when, with his three chums, he was wrecked three miles up the bay from Hampton town.

The roof of the Academy having been properly repaired and the interior put in shape again, school was resumed, and in the pursuit of their studies Rob and his friends did not find many opportunities to get outdoors while the winter lasted, save on Saturdays and holidays, when the sports of the season claimed their undivided attention.

But the weekly meetings of Hampton Troop, led by the Eagle Patrol, continued to be held in their old quarters; and frequently on other nights Tubby, Rob, Andy and Merritt would get together in one of their homes and talk of the great adventure that had come to them when favoring circumstances allowed them to go all the way to Mexico. They read of the rebel chieftain, whose name figured daily in the papers, with far deeper interest than ever before, since they now had a personal knowledge of the man whose warlike doings kept several nations on the anxious seat.

"That was a great experience, fellers," Tubby often sighed, after they had gone over the familiar scenes again and again, always finding something new to discuss; "and I'm afraid we'll never meet with such a heap of good times again. It doesn't stand to reason that we'd ever be that lucky, does it, now?"

And, while the other three reluctantly conceded that Tubby might be right, events proved just the contrary. The scouts of the Eagle Patrol were fated to come across other still more unexpected adventures, such as were calculated to call heavily upon their knowledge of scoutcraft, in order that puzzles might be solved and dangers avoided.

What these experiences were the future only has the power to disclose.

The boys often wondered what had become of Jared Applegate, whether he really did make an effort to reform, or whether he fell back into his old mean ways that seemed bound to get him into serious trouble continually. So far as they knew, his father and mother had heard nothing from him, though Rob thought it his duty to let the old people know that they had seen Jared while down in Mexico, and that he was in Texas when they came away, bent on seeking work on some cattle ranch.

They did have a letter from Lopez, telling them that he had heard the "call" and was about to enlist in the army under the wonderful Villa, meaning to march with the general to take the City of Mexico later on.

Uncle Mark grew steadily better after he knew that a part of his once large fortune had been saved to him through the gratitude of the man whose life he had once been enabled to keep from slipping away. But he feared that never again would he be able to endure the severe labor and perils of penetrating dense jungles and tropical

forests in search of rare orchids, or of exploring unknown countries.

In the future the old traveler would have to be content to sit quietly and take his pleasure in reading of the achievements of other daring souls, who were still in the heyday of their vigorous manhood and capable of enduring privations.

He was deeply interested in all the doings of the Boy Scouts, seeing that the movement was the greatest thing that had ever come to pass for developing the finest American characteristics in the future men of the republic.

Hampton Troop never had a more enthusiastic admirer than Uncle Mark became, and indeed, in all quarters now, the scouts gained a fine reputation for courage, true manliness, and knowledge of the thousand-and-one things a boy ought to know, if he expects to climb up the ladder of advancement. At the time we take leave of our young friends, the prospects of the scouts never looked so bright, and we shall hear more of their adventures in the succeeding volume, entitled "The Boy Scouts on Belgian Battlefields."

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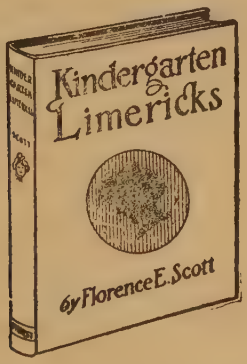

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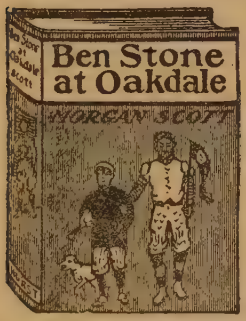

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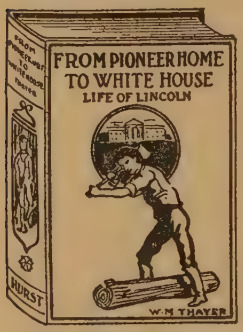

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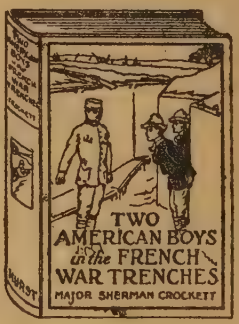

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